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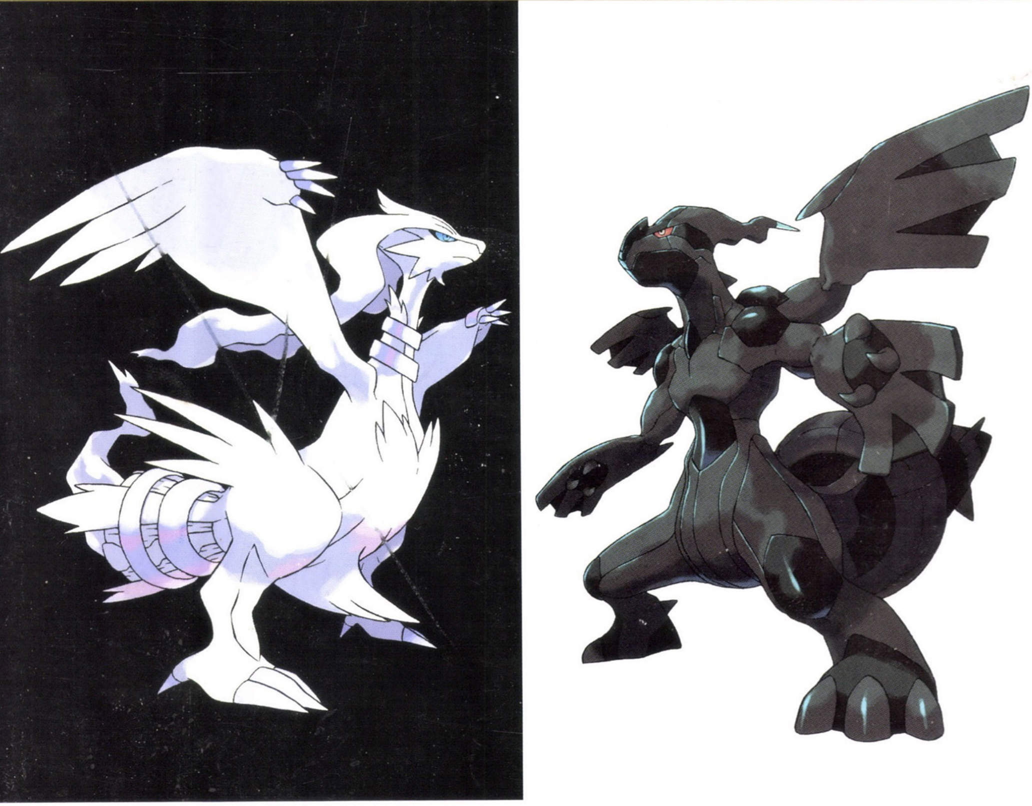

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FEBRUARY 2011
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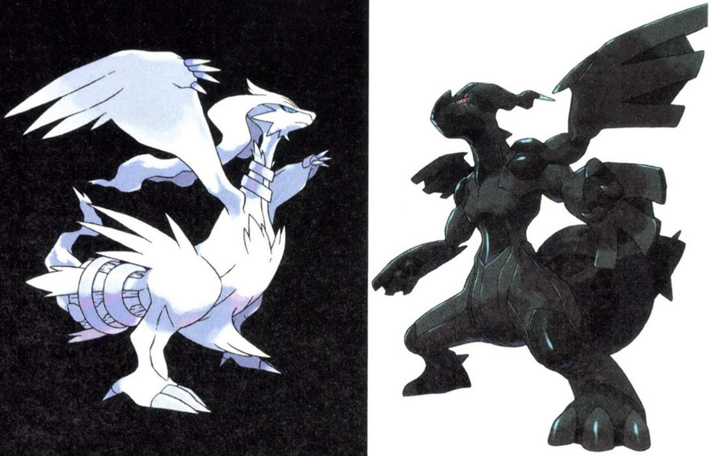
The lost chapter in the Dragon Quest saga—Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation—is finally coming to North America. Find out why you won't want to miss out on this DS epic.



POKÉMON BLACK VERSION AND POKÉMON WHITE VERSION 40

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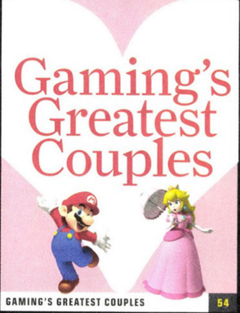

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3DS = NINTENDO 3DS
DS = NINTENDO DS
DW = DSiWARE
NES = NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
VC = VIRTUAL CONSOLE
Wii = Wii / WW = WiiWARE

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Pulse

What Makes a Great Handheld Game?

Chris Slate

It's no coincidence that the Pokémon games are some of the most popular handheld titles of all time. In addition to the lovable characters and everything else that Pokémon is known for, the series nails what I consider to be the three key features that a great portable game must have. First, playing on a handheld can't just feel like a watered-down console experience; otherwise it's something you only settle for when away from home, which isn't too exciting. The many unique hardware capabilities of the Nintendo DS system help a lot in this area. Second, the game needs to be as enjoyable in five-minute bursts as it is for several straight hours. And third, a game has to be structured so that it isn't too hard to get back into if played infrequently. Clever developers have found ways to adhere to these rules while still offering robust and, often, deep gameplay. For a list of the best, check out our Nintendo DS Essentials feature on pg. 60.

CHRIS SLATE **EDITOR IN CHIEF**

GIANT REVIEWS▶
NINTENDO POWER
MONSTER TALE
10-PAGE BLOWOUT!
MARIO JAMS!

V263 JANUARY 2010

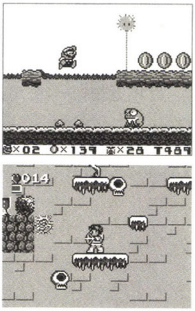
Chris Slate here, back once again to answer your letters while giving my staff cute nicknames and making them battle each other. But first, this month's special letter request: what is your favorite or least favorite thing about playing handheld games? Send your responses to the address on page 8, and we'll print the best ones!

LETTERS

Gone But Not Forgotten

Do you guys ever miss the older handhelds like the Game Boy, Game Boy Color, or Game Boy Advance? —**RASCAL**

Personally, I've been so happy with my Nintendo DS that I haven't gotten too nostalgic about its predecessors. I do sometimes get an itch to play old Game Boy games, and I'm thrilled that the upcoming Nintendo 3DS handheld will offer many of them through its Virtual Console service. The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening DX, Super Mario Land 2: 6 Golden Coins, and Kid Icarus: Of Myths and Monsters top my wish list.



Who's up for some Game Boy?

Love the Glove

I just noticed that Mario wears gloves, and then I saw that Sonic wears gloves, too! And when I read your feature on Kingdom Hearts Re:coded—guess what?—I saw that Mickey's hands are also covered by those same gloves! Why do you think a lot of video game characters wear gloves? **—THAT ONE GUY**

Fighting evil is a dirty business. And, by the way—you just noticed Mario wears gloves? He has a mustache too, you know.

Get the Power!

In Vol. 260, you asked for a modernized version of the jingle from the old Nintendo Power commercials. Well, for better or worse, I did it:

Get the Power!
Nintendo Power.
Nintendo news and game reviews,
Nintendo Power!
Higher and higher,
Nintendo games, we never get tired!

You're welcome. **—DAVID**

I love the line about us never getting tired. Not only is it completely random, but it seems to suggest that we're game-playing cyborgs genetically designed to dish out game previews and reviews without ever stopping, like some kind of game-playing Terminators. Come to think of it, that's about right!

After reading your story on Monster Tale, I've decided that I don't want the game—I *need* it. It's like they took parts from all of my favorite games and put them together into a single superhuman *megagame*! Exploration! Pet raising! Puzzle stuff! Bring it on! **—PIXEL PROPHET**

a TALE of TWO GENRES

Eager to Learn

What if, in the not-so-far-off future, schools offer classes on old video games? Instead of textbooks we could be assigned an old NES and Game Boy! **—BLUESNAILT**

Plenty of colleges offer courses in game design, so maybe similar classes will hit high schools one day. Then, maybe we will finally hear a teacher say, "Students, take out your video games!"

Link Smash!

Does Link have no self-control when it comes to breaking and entering? Why hasn't he gotten in trouble? Or is it normal for the people of Hyrule to have their valuables smashed on a daily basis? **—PSYCHO KIRA**

Dude, the guy has saved the world countless times—if he wants to bash down your door and smash all your pots, then that's what he gets to do.

Strange Love

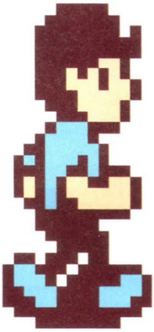
Ah, Nintendo Power, how I am addicted to reading you. Every time I get a new issue, I grab it and don't play a single video game till I've read all of you. Worried I am not, because you are so awesome. I even read the articles about games that I shall never even play. Oh how I love you, Nintendo Power. **—SIR KYLE**

Nintendo Power, uh, loves you too? Should I be this creeped out?

I Like Mike

I know this is a little late, but I was very happy to see Mike, the hero from StarTropics, among the classic characters on the subscriber cover of Vol. 260. But when I read the many gaming memories in the NES anniversary feature, StarTropics was nowhere to be found! I loved that game in my younger days and I still play it when I can. Mike is as much of a hero to me as Link, Mario, Samus, or Kirby. How could no one else have awesome memories of this game? **—THE TENTH SAGE**

There were simply too many classic games and characters to fit into our feature, but I agree that Mike is a hero worthy of remembering. Hey, he took on bad guys with a yo-yo—how badass is *that*?



Don't worry, Mike—we haven't forgotten you!

Welcome Back

I would like to thank all of the wonderful people at Nintendo Power for bringing me back to the Wii. You see, there came a time when I just wasn't interested in the Wii at all. But then, while browsing through my brother's issues of NP, I came upon a feature about Mega Man 10 and saw that it included an Easy mode. This lured me in, because I'd never beaten a Mega Man game before and figured this would be a good place to start. Since then I have enjoyed the heck out of the entire Mega Man series, as well as other great games like Cave Story and the Mario franchise. Now my interest in the Wii keeps growing and shows no signs of slowing down. **—CONNOR "MEGA" R.**

Glad to have you back, Connor! One of the best things about the Wii console is its incredibly diverse library of games. Give enough of them a try, and you're bound to find whole new genres that you never knew you'd love.

Kidding Around

I know this is random, but I'd like to say that of all the apes in the DK Crew, my favorite is Kiddy Kong. I like him more than the supermodel-esque Candy Kong, the peanut-shooting Diddy Kong, or even Donkey Kong! I love his personality, and his outfit is cool. It's too bad he wasn't in Donkey Kong Country Returns! **—MONKEYBARMONSTER**

DON'T HASSLE THE HOFF

We interrupt your regularly scheduled column to bring you this important announcement from the Hoff:

Dr. Mario? Seriously? You picked *him* as the doctor you'd trust to treat you in last issue's edition of The Score? I mean, sure, he's a great hero and he has a fine mustache and all, but you'd go to him for *medical treatment*? The guy's a plumber, for crying out loud! At best, he'd try to help you out by hurling vitamins at you from a distance. I can see you taking a pass on Dr. Crygor (he's a little messed up in the head), but Dr. Light and Dr. Robotnik are certifiable geniuses! Robotnik's IQ is more than 300! I suppose there's a chance you'd wake up and discover that your arm has been replaced with a laser cannon, or maybe you've been transformed into a crazy robot animal or whatever, but that's a small price to pay when the alternative is appendix removal by way of a plunger.

There has been only one game for which the box made me want to buy it, and that's Kirby Super Star Ultra for the DS. The box was so shiny and Kirby was adorable! I looked at the back of the box and thought it looked cool, so I bought it. I'm glad I did, because it's a great game. —**CHAKAN**

NINTENDO DS
Kirby
SUPER STAR ULTRA
RATING PENDING
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Have you ever bought a video game because of its box?

My family and I were in an airport in Amsterdam and we stopped by a gift shop while waiting for our flight. My brother and I had just finished clearing Metroid: Zero Mission and were itching for a new game to play. As we browsed through the shop's game section, I came across Golden Sun. I was hooked as soon as I looked at the box. I got my dad to buy it, and then I happily skipped out of the store. It took me a couple of years to start playing it, though, because back then I didn't like RPGs at all. But thanks to that box, I am now a very huge Golden Sun fan. —**TREVOR MCFUR**

I bought New Super Mario Bros. Wii because of its red box with the shiny Wii logo. When I saw it in the store, I knew that I had to get it for the holidays. —**BRAD**

I haven't bought a game for just its box (although covers have sometimes helped me make a decision between games), but on Christmas Day one year my sisters and I woke up at two in the morning and went straight to the tree, where I saw the most beautiful game cover I had ever seen for Super Mario Galaxy. It was so amazing that I sat there gaping at it for about five minutes until I realized that the game would be even better than the box. —**DUST MAN**

The one game I bought because of its box is Pokémon FireRed. I didn't know much about the Pokémon series at the time, but that Charizard on the front of the box looked so inviting! —**ZITZ**

I've always bought games because of the box! In fact, I have a whole system of tests before I buy a game: 1. Is the cover good? 2. Is the genre up my alley? 3. Check pictures and videos. I always look for Japanese anime characters on the cover; those games are the coolest for me. —**FINALFANTOM**

When it comes to box art, nothing will probably ever top the NES era in terms of originality and variety. The gaping chasm between truly outstanding boxes (such as the ones for Contra, Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse, and Mega Man 5) and laughable artwork (such as the US artwork for Mega Man and the European box for Mega Man 2) made this era unique on so many levels. —**MATT "TIGMO" H.**

I went to buy Hey You, Pikachu! for the Nintendo 64, but then a game with a cute puppy caught my eye: Harvest Moon 64. I didn't know anything about the series, but the fact that a dog was on the box interested me. I ended up playing the crap out of that game and I'm still pretty invested in the franchise. —**MARY DAN**

Probably the only game I've bought for its box is Super Mario All-Stars for Wii. Its box is so great, with Mario giving a 1-up—I mean thumbs-up!—and the power of two certain words: "limited edition." I had to preorder the game even before I looked for information about it online. —**THELUIGIMANFAN**

When I was six, I saw The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask with Link on the cover, swinging his sword, and thought, "That looks really cool!" I bought the game because of the box art, and it sparked an obsession with Zelda that lasts to this day. —**ROSS M.**

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Understand that the magazine staff is separate from Nintendo; we don't make the games.

Don't send links to game coverage on the Web—trust us; we see it all.

Don't ask about the status of upcoming games, or whether certain games will be announced; if we have that info, we'll always tell you.

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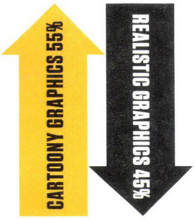
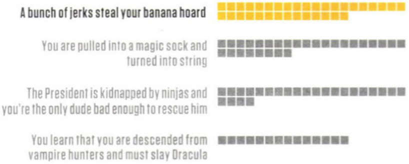
What Nintendo fans think, want, and do

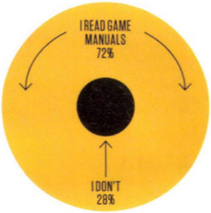
The SCORE

WEIGH IN ON NEXT MONTH'S TOPICS AT WWW.NINTENDOPOWER.COM/POLLS.

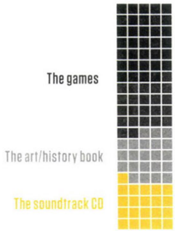


WHICH VIDEO GAME SCENARIO IS MOST LIKELY TO HAPPEN TO YOU?



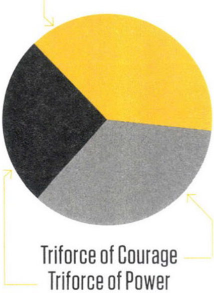


WHAT IS THE BEST PART OF SUPER MARIO ALL-STARS FOR WII?



Which piece of the Triforce would you want to own?

TRIFORCE OF WISDOM



SAMUS

IS WHO YOU WOULD MOST LIKE TO GET A VALENTINE FROM

Samus 40% · Princess Zelda 23% · Princess Peach 14% · Bowser 8%
Professor Layton 8% · Chun Li 4% · Mia Fey 3%

18 PERCENT OF YOU THINK NINJA SCHOOL IS A WASTE OF MONEY.

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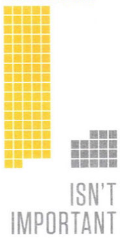

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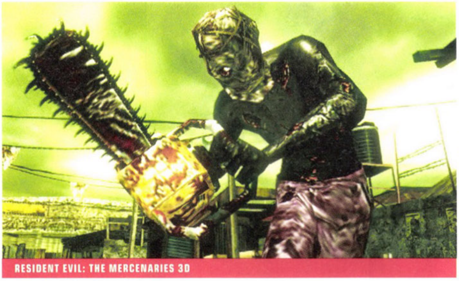
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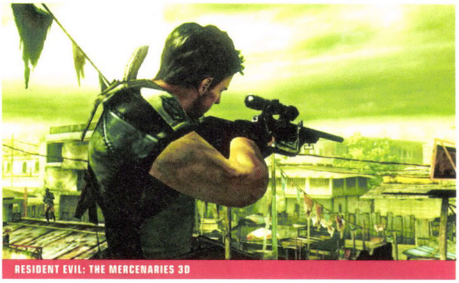
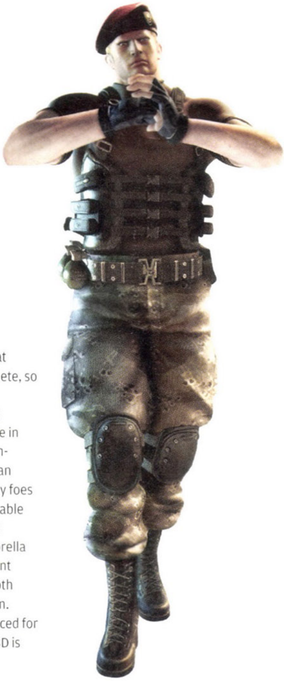

RESIDENT EVIL: THE MERCENARIES 3D

The Possessor of Two Evils

Capcom shares new details on its double dose of survival-horror for the Nintendo 3DS.

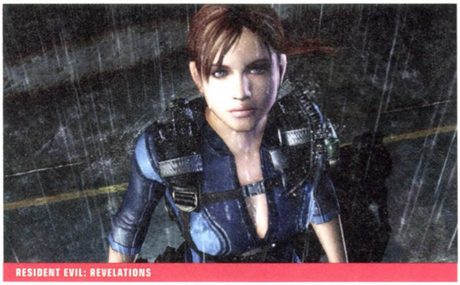


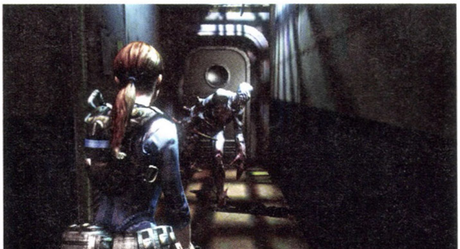
AS WE'VE REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, Capcom is preparing not one but *two* titles from its series of Mature-rated hits for the Nintendo 3DS handheld. The publisher recently released new screenshots from both projects—Resident Evil: Revelations and Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D—and disclosed some new tidbits about the games.

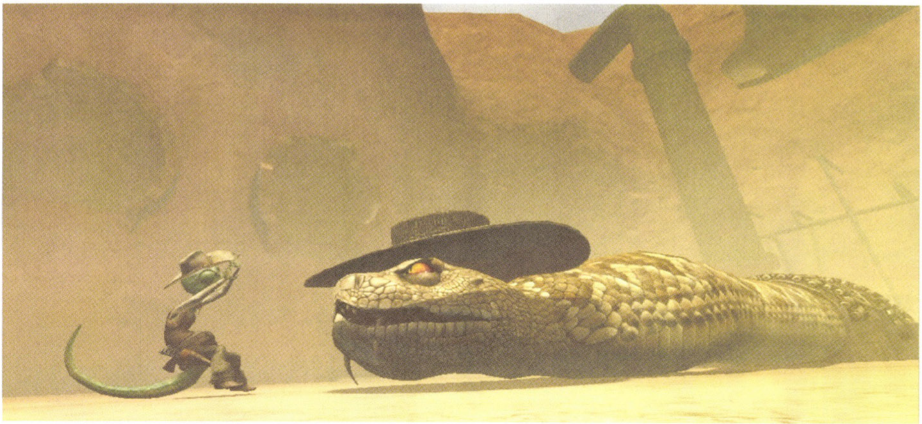
Revelations is an all-new chapter set between the time of Resident Evil 4 and Resident Evil 5. It reunites the franchise's original protagonists—Chris Redfield and Jill Valentine—as they investigate a stranded luxury cruise liner for the newly formed B.S.A.A. (that's the Bioterrorism Security Assessment Alliance for those keeping track). Though the ship will serve as the primary location for the game, Capcom revealed that players will also explore other locales. And longtime fans of the series may be excited to hear that Revelations will bring back the focus on fear and suspense rather than follow the action-heavy approach of recent installments. The bad news is that Capcom pegs development at being only 20% complete, so we'll probably have to wait a while for this one.

The Mercenaries 3D is quite a bit further along, at 70% completion. It's based on the Mercenaries mode in Resident Evil 5, and is essentially a fast-paced, action-oriented time-attack offering in which two players can team up over Wi-Fi to gun down as many bloodthirsty foes as possible. Thus far, Capcom has revealed four playable characters—Chris Redfield and his sister, Claire; Jack Krauser from Resident Evil 4; and the infamous Umbrella commando Hunk. Each character comes with inherent strengths, and you'll be able to further customize both them and your weapons via a new experience system.

No North American release date has been announced for either game, though it sounds like The Mercenaries 3D is likely to hit sometime this year. **—STEVE T.**


RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS


RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS

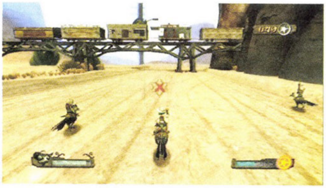


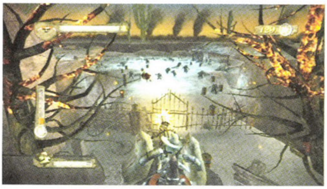
Leaping Lizard

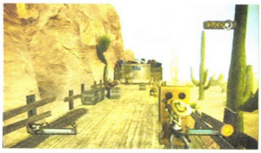
In **Rango The Video Game** for Wii and DS, shooting rodents and hitting zombies with golf balls is all part of the job.

IT SHOULD GO without saying at this point that movies geared toward the younger set (the upcoming CGI flick *Rango*, in this case) will have an accompanying game. While many licensed titles simply retell the events of the film upon which they're based, however, the Electronic Arts-distributed Rango The Video Game serves more as a companion piece; you play through the tall tales that main character Rango—a chameleon who becomes the sheriff of the Wild West town of Dirt—tells folks in the film. You have to jump, climb, and shoot (making good use of the Wii Remote controller's pointer) your way through a hazard-filled canyon, for example. But there is a definite emphasis on the *tall* part of *tall tales*, meaning that the scenarios get much more outlandish; you can smack explosive golf balls at waves of zombies, for instance, or dive into an arcade game and brawl with pixelated baddies.

Behaviour Interactive (formerly Artificial Mind & Movement) has a lot of experience working with the various Nintendo platforms, and the developer seems to be doing a solid job with Rango. We should have more details as Rango The Video Game's March release date nears. **—JUSTIN C.**







Shooting is a key part of the gameplay.

A WINNER IS...

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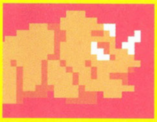

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Jungle Jabber

Now that we've spent dozens of hours playing **Donkey Kong Country Returns**, we're revisiting the game with two key members of its development team.

Still going ape over Donkey Kong Country Returns? So are we. But we took a break from working through the final few temple stages to chat with producer Kensuke Tanabe and assistant producer Risa Tabata, who—along with the supertalented team at Retro Studios—crafted what is arguably Donkey Kong's best game since his 1981 debut. —CHRIS S.

KENSUKE TANABE

RISA TABATA

NINTENDO POWER **The Rocket Barrel and mine-cart areas are very difficult but extremely addictive. How did the development team find the right balance for these stages?**

KENSUKE TANABE It wasn't just the Rocket Barrels and the mine carts. When designing the levels, we set priority rankings regarding how much material could be worked in that would just make us go, "Wow!", and we made all sorts of requests. The final balance adjustments for lots of the areas was left to Ms. Tabata. What sort of criteria did you use?

RISA TABATA Mostly that the parts the player needs in order to clear the level will make them shiver and think, "That was close!", but that they won't actually get hit by things often as long as they aren't reckless. Also that, when the player advances a step by doing things like collecting puzzle pieces and K-O-N-G letters, there's a bit of danger involved. The course design, gimmicks, and item distribution for the Rocket Barrels and the mine carts were well done to begin with, so there are many places where we just left everything to Retro.

K.T. With the mine carts, it isn't about jumping with perfect accuracy from as close to the edge as possible. The player has to think about when he's going to start the jump, and also how best to use the jump button in this particular situation, whether to tap it or hold it. We had them keep that facet of level design in mind, that having to adjust your gameplay to the present situation.

R.T. That's right. And then there was how bananas are used. In the areas in the first half, when you go to get bananas, there are lots places where you'll naturally advance in safety, you know? For example, if you jump to grab a banana, you'll automatically jump across a pit as well. But I remember we took out those "guide bananas" in the areas in the final half.

K.T. I liked the power of concentration and sense of tension you need in order to start a jump from an accurate place when you're in a speeding mine cart, the way you start to feel when you're on a roller coaster and you break out in a cold sweat. What about you, Ms. Tabata?

R.T. I like the feeling of tension you get when sizing up the obstacles and items that appear one after another, and in handling them well. You think, "There's an item over there, but I won't be able to get it by just jumping normally, so...," and while you're thinking that, you've gone past it, so after the fact you realize, "Drat! If I'd stomped on that bad guy and then jumped, I could have done it!", and then you're annoyed with yourself. Then, when you try again, of course you forget, and you do the same thing.... Hey, wait—that makes it sound like I'm just slow....

K.T. Come to think of it, I seem to recall you being pretty bad at the Rocket Barrels....

R.T. I think I'm bad at delicate operations. You know, because I'm slow. [Laughs] Personally, it was the Rocket Barrels that made me break out in a cold sweat. I'd accidentally press the button too many times and go up all in a rush, and when I panicked and yanked my finger away, I'd faaaall! Just like that. Although I do like the parts that make you want to get all psyched up and noisy.

K.T. Well, for me, controlling that simple yet subtle matter of how long to press the button was a lot of fun.

The Tiki Tak Tribe provides some memorable boss battles throughout the game. Which are your favorites, and how did the idea for the tribe come about? Why was it decided to replace the series's former villains, King K. Rool and the Kremlings?

K.T. When we spoke with Mr. Miyamoto about the characters that would appear, we only asked him about what he wanted to keep, basically. We thought that, since we were doing this, we might as well make everything else new.

R.T. Then, when we told Retro about it, that's when the Tiki Tak idea came up.

K.T. When we saw the first rough sketches for the characters, we wondered if they were going for a sort of "African drums" image, since the stage was a jungle, but we gave the direction the go-ahead on just that one try.

R.T. We thought we should make them scary, since they're the bad guys, and I have a very clear memory of telling Retro we wanted them to play up the fear of inorganic beings. It's just creepier when you can't tell what they're thinking, you know? Then Retro said they'd like to put in games that use music and wondered if that could be worked into the scenario, so, in the end, all the Tiki Taks turned into instruments that can produce notes.

K.T. Oh, so that's why they turned out to be such a noisy group! Still, by that time, we weren't being very picky about it.

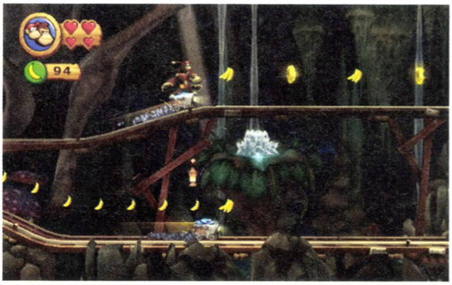
R.T. We discussed making the bosses so that you just had to stomp on them, the way they were in the Super NES Donkey Kong Country games.

K.T. We wanted to make them something you could really play against, though, so we came up with all sorts of ideas. When we settled on Mugly's specs, Retro worried that they were too complicated, and that he might be too difficult.

R.T. We asked them to just try making him, because we'd know once we played him whether he was complicated or not; we had them make a trial version. I think there was a breadth of play that came through as a result: you evade the opponent's attacks, and vary your timing when you try stomping on him.

K.T. Personally, I think I like the Scurvy Crew. They're simple, but they've got a unique setup.

R.T. I'm a Mugly fan. That basic method of playing, just stomping on the opponent, feels good, and I think it's got the right amount of tension to it.



"Muncher Marathon" is one of the most tense and exhilarating levels we've played in a long time. Can you provide any background info on how this stage was conceived, built, or tuned?

K.T. I remember that, in the first place, Retro said they wanted to put a forced-scroll scene in somewhere.

R.T. My memory's a bit hazy too, but I do remember that Retro proposed a part where you're being chased by something big and you just have to run. In the beginning, I got the feeling they were talking about running from some other thing, though. Like being chased by a gigantic dinosaur jaw, or something.... Wait, was it something else?

K.T. Do you remember how it got to be a spider?

R.T. It had already turned into a spider by the time I noticed it, so I think that was another of Retro's ideas. I'm not so great with spiders myself, so when there's a huge, skittering swarm of them coming after me, I get—in a good way—this feeling of terror. I think, "I absolutely do not want to get caught by those things, so I'm gonna run for my life!" What we were careful about during the fine-tuning was to find ways to delay the players.

K.T. If all you do in a course is run, the enemy will never catch up to the good players. But if you stop and use up time doing something, the fear of that enemy bearing down on you from behind really comes alive.

The ability to play Donkey Kong Country Returns with a friend is a very welcome addition. What challenges had to be overcome to incorporate this feature? Which parts of the game do you personally find to be the most fun to play with two players?

K.T. The ones who had all the trouble were the engineers at Retro. They had to do some really ingenious things to make sure Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong didn't look odd when they overlapped; I was very impressed with that.

R.T. There was the issue of processing speed, too. You had Donkey Kong, you had Diddy Kong, you had Rambi.... I think that must have been pretty tough.

K.T. The first time I saw [Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong] sprinting across the Volcano test level, it made a huge impression on me.

R.T. Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong don't collide; at first, I wasn't sure if that would really be OK, and it worried me a bit. In the end, though, it was good. It made it easier to play. There's a feeling of cooperation, of advancing together, that I think was amplified. For enjoying the cooperation elements, I think places with many enemies, like stage 3-5, Itty Bitty Biters, are good. If you're out to enjoy the sort of accidents that can only happen during team play, 7-6, Switcheroo, is good. When the staff members played 7-6 during development, it got really loud and crazy.

The temple stages provide the game's toughest tests. How was the approach in designing these levels different from the approach to normal stages? Do you have any encouraging words for players who might be struggling to complete them all?

K.T. Ms. Tabata was the one who fine-tuned those levels. I can't clear them, either.

R.T. No, actually, I'm not that good at action games myself, so I'm not really confident here.... I'm particularly desperate when I'm playing the temple stages in the last half. [Laughs] There are quite a few very skilled gamers on staff at Retro. You could think of it as their letter of challenge to players who've played lots of games and are looking forward to something tougher. They're white-knuckle courses, so when you're playing them, the tension is incredible; however, when you get stuck, take a little break and try to relax. If you go back into things emotionally refreshed, you may manage to advance with unexpected ease. The harder you work at it, the bigger the feeling of achievement you'll get once you clear the level!

Although used sparingly, the silhouette stages—in which Donkey Kong and much of the environment are rendered as shadows—make a big impression. Why was this unique visual style added to the game, and what extra challenges were involved in making it work?

K.T. That was a proposal from the artists at Retro. Didn't they show us a stage set on a snow-covered mountain at night first?

R.T. There was a full moon, alone in the sky. When Donkey Kong ran through that scene, it left a real impression. His red necktie was streaming behind him.

K.T. I honestly don't really understand the technical trouble involved.

R.T. I don't either. Retro did all the heavy lifting there! [Laughs] On the course design, since everything was pitch-black, I'd think one of the drawbacks was that it was hard to tell things apart, wouldn't you? For example, how do you tell a foothold that will fall if you step on it from one that won't? Oh, that's right; once I said that, it jogged my memory. We noticed it in the second half of the game; there was an unexpected blind spot, remember? You couldn't tell the Super Guide mode from normal mode. In the silhouette stages, the characters are pitch-black to begin with, so the white Donkey Kong (Super Kong) in the Super Guide mode looked just like the ordinary brown Donkey Kong. We solved that on the fly by making Super Kong's necktie blue. I guess you could almost say that, because of the silhouette stages, Super Kong's appearance is complete now.

Cranky Kong is very funny in this game. Why was he chosen as the only other Kong (besides Donkey Kong and Diddy Kong) to return from the series's extended cast?

K.T. That came from our discussion with Mr. Miyamoto, too. He said, "Well, let's keep Cranky," so we went right ahead and kept him.

R.T. That's right. We'd already had plans to put in a shop where players could buy items, so we decided to make him the shopkeeper.

K.T. Cynics like Cranky are unusual for Nintendo characters, so I think he adds a nice bit of zest to the mix.

R.T. Cranky is a cynic, true, but somehow you just can't hate him. When I'm in the shop talking with Cranky, I tend to chuckle a bit. I think the way he falls asleep after a little while is kinda cute, too. He adds some zest, and he gives you a nice break.

Finally, do you have a message for Donkey Kong Country Returns players who have been diligently playing the game since its release?

R.T. I think all sorts of different people will enjoy Donkey Kong Country Returns. Those who like the Donkey Kong Country series, those who like action games, and those who like playing in groups and getting all wild and crazy. We've put in the Super Guide, items, and other helpful elements for those who aren't good at action games so that even they can move forward, and it may be fun for them to play in multiplayer mode and get help from someone who's a good player. I hope the advanced gamers out there will make their way through the temple stages, and that they'll try for the fastest speed on the timed game! Set a record that will knock the socks off the master gamers at Retro!

K.T. Wow. You sure said a mouthful.

R.T. Well, my own timed game record is.... Ahem, um, yes. [Laughs]

K.T. All right, you heard her: we hope you'll all enjoy it.

For even more behind-the-scenes info on the creation of Donkey Kong Country Returns, check out Nintendo president Satoru Iwata's interview of Tanabe, Tabata, and members of Retro Studios. It's at the Iwata Asks website (http://us.wii.com/iwata_asks/).

STAR POWER

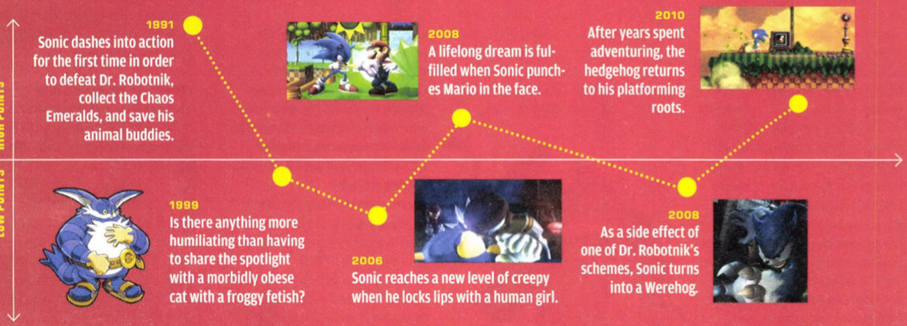
A closer look at the characters we love

FIRST APPEARANCE:
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
SEGA GENESIS, 1991

Sonic the Hedgehog

He's the original blue dude with a 'tude, and he's spin-dashed his way to the top.

CAREER GRAPH



1991
Sonic dashes into action for the first time in order to defeat Dr. Robotnik, collect the Chaos Emeralds, and save his animal buddies.

1999
Is there anything more humiliating than having to share the spotlight with a morbidly obese cat with a froggy fetish?

2006
Sonic reaches a new level of creepy when he locks lips with a human girl.

2008
A lifelong dream is fulfilled when Sonic punches Mario in the face.

2008
As a side effect of one of Dr. Robotnik's schemes, Sonic turns into a Werehog.

2010
After years spent adventuring, the hedgehog returns to his platforming roots.

OUR FAVORITE SONIC THE HEDGEHOG GAMES

SCORE 29000
TIME 0:19
RINGS 20

Sonic the Hedgehog

SEGA GENESIS, 1991

The original. The classic. The game that introduced the feisty hedgehog to the world. Sonic's premiere title features terrific level design, fantastic controls, incredibly colorful graphics, and a catchy score. It's no wonder that this game made Sonic an instant icon.

SCORE 0
TIME 0'05"56
RINGS 0

Sonic CD

SEGA CD, 1993

Sonic CD expanded on everything that was great about the first Sonic title. It introduced a great new enemy—Metal Sonic—and the time-travel mechanic added a surprising amount of depth. Plus, you gotta love the 3D bonus stages and that anime intro!

Sonic Rush

NINTENDO DS, 2005

While the console versions of Sonic shifted to 3D, fans turned to handheld systems to get "classic" 2D Sonic action. Sonic's first DS title retained the feel of the 16-bit games with its incredibly fast action and exciting stages.

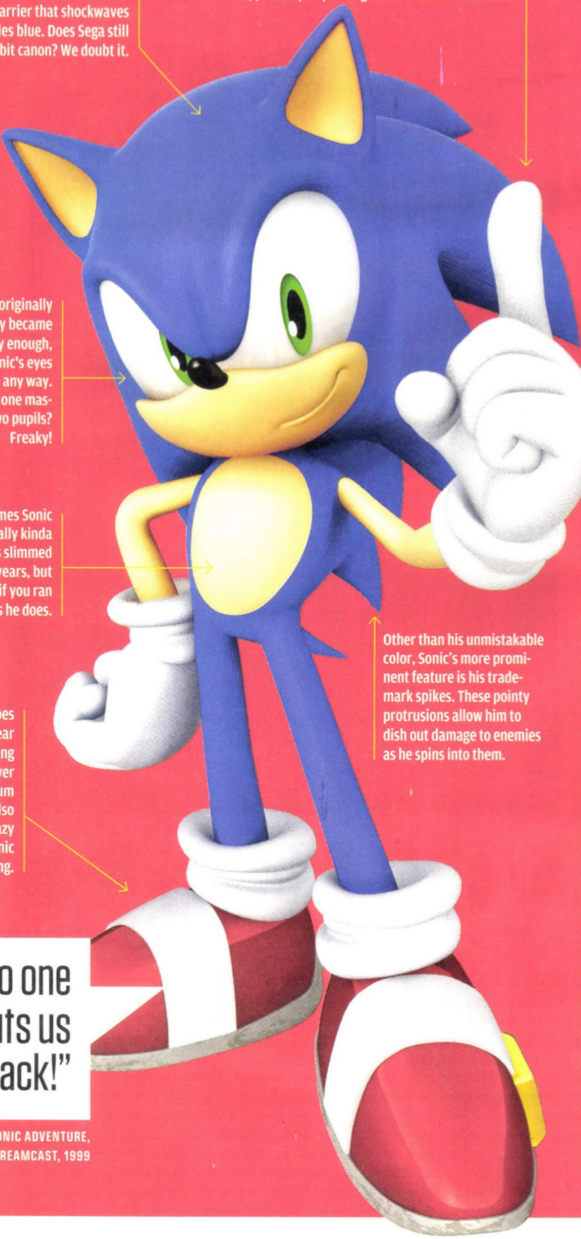
Sonic Colors

Wii, 2010

It's no secret that some fans have been disappointed by Sonic's recent games. Lucky for all of us, Sonic Colors is a true return to form for the 'hog. Even new additions like the power-up-granting Wisps enhance the gameplay rather than detract from it.

In an old Sonic comic, it was explained that the Blue Blur was originally a more hedge-hog-y shade of brown. It wasn't until he broke the sound barrier that shockwaves turned his needles blue. Does Sega still consider this tidbit canon? We doubt it.

Not known for being humble, Sonic loves to wag his finger in other people's faces. It's worth noting that Sonic and Mario apparently buy their gloves from the same store.



Sonic's eyes were originally black, but later they became green. Strangely enough, you'll notice that Sonic's eyes are not separated in any way. Does he really have one massive eyeball with two pupils? Freaky!

In his early games Sonic was actually kinda pudgy. He's slimmed down over the years, but you would too if you ran as much as he does.

Other than his unmistakable color, Sonic's more prominent feature is his trademark spikes. These pointy protrusions allow him to dish out damage to enemies as he spins into them.

These stylish shoes are the only footwear capable of processing the blast whenever Sonic reaches maximum speed. They're also great for tapping at lazy players who make Sonic stand still for too long.

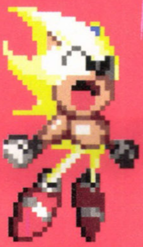
> "Man, no one ever cuts us any slack!"

SONIC ADVENTURE,
SEGA DREAMCAST, 1999

4Kids
SONIC X
THE NEW WORLD SAGA
13
The Fastest Thing Alive!

EXPANDED UNIVERSE

The world of Sonic the Hedgehog isn't limited to video games. There have been *four* popular TV series based on Sonic (*Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Adventures of Sonic the Hedgehog*, *Sonic Underground*, and *Sonic X*), all of which are currently available on DVD. And in 1993, Archie Comics began running a monthly Sonic comic book that is still being published today!



GONE GOLD

Sonic's most powerful special technique was first discovered in Sonic the Hedgehog 2. Upon collecting all of the Chaos Emeralds, Sonic could transform into Super Sonic. Sonic's Super mode changes his color from blue to yellow and causes his spikes to grow. This new version of Sonic is typically much faster and stronger than his usual self.

POWER QUIZ

EASY

What is the name of the gal who Donkey Kong goes ape over in Donkey Kong Country?

AVERAGE

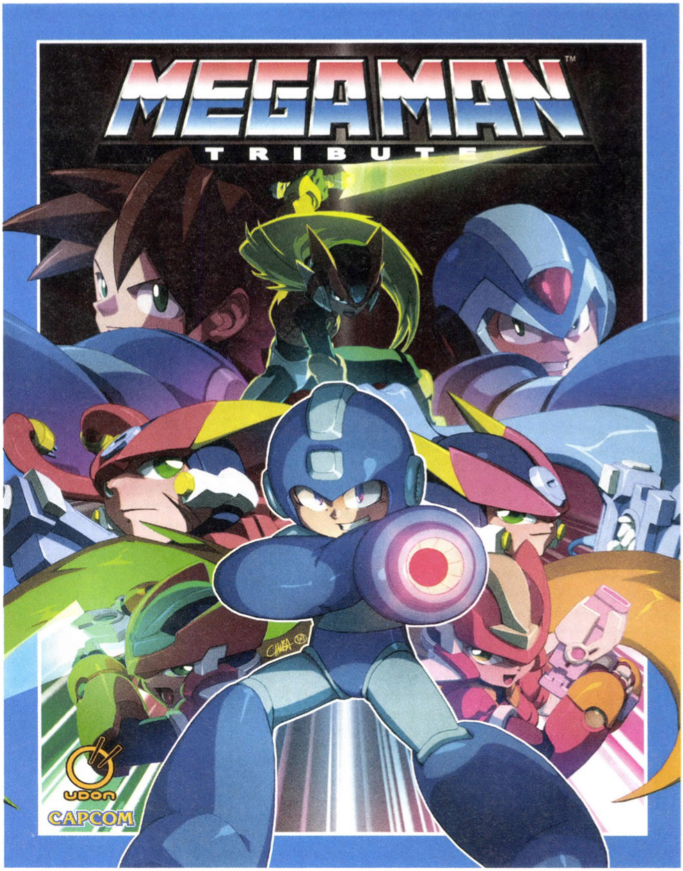
In the original Harvest Moon game for the Super NES, how many potential brides live in your town?

HARDCORE

What are the names of the six women you can marry in Phantasy Star III: Generations of Doom?

ANSWERS

EASY: Candy Kong; AVERAGE: Five; HARDCORE: Maia, Lena, Thea, Sari, Laya, and Alair



By Mega Fans, for Mega Fans

Pledge your allegiance to the Blue Bomber with the **Mega Man Tribute** art book.

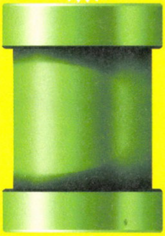
FOR MORE THAN 23 years, Mega Man has been one of the most iconic characters in video games. Now UDON Entertainment (publisher of the *Mega Man Megamix* manga and several other Mega Man products) is preparing to celebrate that success with the *Mega Man Tribute* art book. Featuring artwork inspired by the original Mega Man series, Mega Man X, Mega Man Legends, Mega Man Zero, and Mega Man ZX, the 300-page book promises to provide a unique look at the beloved robotic hero, as well as his allies and enemies.

Though there have been Mega Man art books released in the past, what separates this one from the pack is that it will contain artwork drawn by the fans—the artists, illustrators, and designers that have grown up playing Mega Man's beloved adventures. And by artists and illustrators, we mean you! UDON will be accepting submissions through January 31, so if you think you've got what it takes to be a part of Mega Man history, head over to www.megamantribute.com to read the official rules and learn how to submit your drawings, paintings, sculptures, or other creations. (Just be sure your art doesn't include any characters from the Mega Man Battle Network or Mega Man Star Force series, or any non-Mega Man series characters.) Considering the stellar results of UDON's previous similar efforts—*Street Fighter Tribute* and *Darkstalkers Tribute*—*Mega Man Tribute* should prove to be spectacular when it's released in the second half of 2011. —**CHRIS H.**

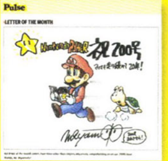
WARP ZONE

What we were writing about way back when

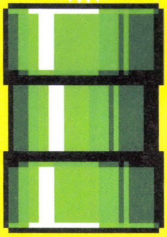
5 YEARS AGO



Can you believe it's been five years since Nintendo Power celebrated its 200th issue? And what a celebration it was—in addition to remarks from Shigeru Miyamoto and Reggie Fils-Aime, the issue contained an exclusive Nintendo poster from superstar comic-book artist J. Scott Campbell. The NP Top 200 countdown reached its conclusion, as well: Metroid Prime, Resident Evil 4, and an assortment of Mario and Zelda games comprised the top 10.

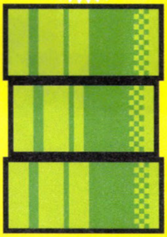

Pulse
LETTER OF THE MONTH
Nintendo Power

10 YEARS AGO



With its unique visual style and unusual spin on the RPG formula, Paper Mario for the Nintendo 64 turned a lot of heads when it arrived on the scene in early 2001, and Nintendo Power responded with a massive strategy-filled cover story. The February 2001 issue also contained features on Mega Man 64 and Pokémon Stadium 2, along with an early look at the Game Boy Advance and its Japanese launch titles.

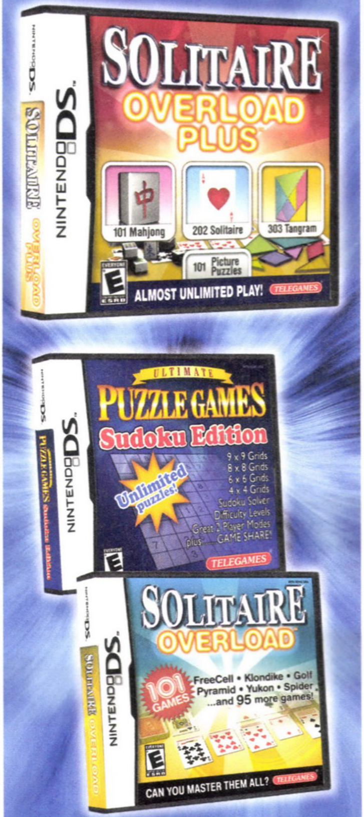
20 YEARS AGO



NINTENDO POWER
STAR TROPICS
Perils in Paradise
TMNT II: The Arcade Game
Ultima: Quest of the Avatar
Plus!

Although it was released in December 1990, island adventure game StarTropics was the cover story for the February 1991 issue of Nintendo Power. Inside the magazine, however, Pizza Power took center stage as Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Arcade Game received a 16-page feature complete with maps, tips, and codes. A small story toward the back of the magazine quietly announced the impending debut of the Super NES.

Virtually Unlimited Entertainment


NINTENDO DS
SOLITAIRE OVERLOAD PLUS
101 Mahjong
202 Solitaire
303 Tangram
101 Picture Puzzles
ALMOST UNLIMITED PLAY!
TELEGAMES
ULTIMATE PUZZLE GAMES
Sudoku Edition
Unlimited puzzles!
9 x 9 Grids
8 x 8 Grids
6 x 6 Grids
4 x 4 Grids
Sudoku Solver
Difficulty Levels
Great 2 Player Modes
plus......GAME SHARE!
SOLITAIRE OVERLOAD
101 GAMES
FreeCell • Klondike • Golf
Pyramid • Yukon • Spider
...and 95 more games!
CAN YOU MASTER THEM ALL?
EVERYONE
E
ESRB

All Games Designed with VUE™ Technology

EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

AVAILABLE AT

BEST BUY Thousands of Possibilities. Get Yours.
GameStop power to the players
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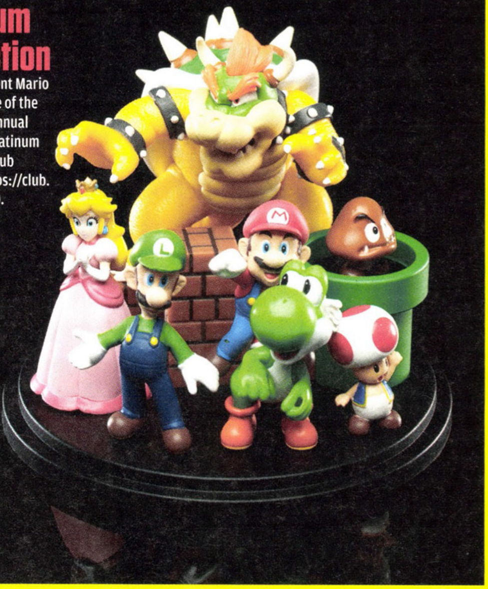
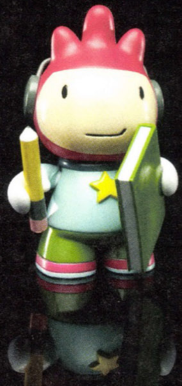
Platinum Perfection

This magnificent Mario diorama is one of the most recent annual rewards for Platinum members of Club Nintendo (https://club.nintendo.com).



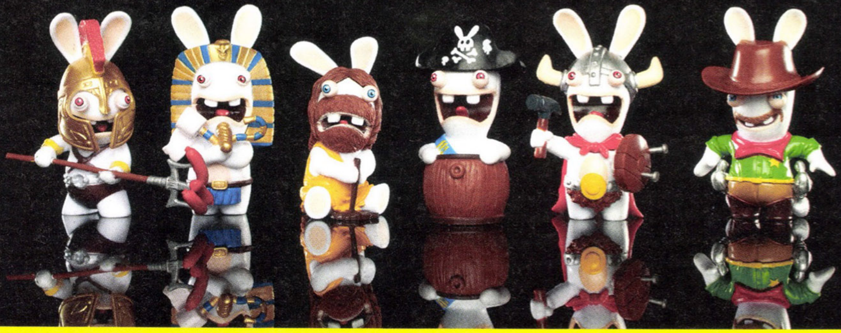
To the Max

We're used to seeing him only as a flat 2D drawing in the Scribblenauts games, but the third dimension suits series star Maxwell.



Time Bandits

This characters in this cute and collectible set of figures come from the recently released Raving Rabbids: Travel in Time for the Wii console.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARK MADEO

GAME FORECAST

Wii

AAA Lucha Libre: Heroes del Ring	Konami	3/11
Captain America: Super Soldier	Sega	7/11
Cartoon Network*	Crave	HOL 11
Conduit 2	Sega	2/11
de Blob 2	THQ	2/11
Driver San Francisco	Ubisoft	2011
Enclave: Shadows of Twilight	TopWare	TBA
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	Warner Bros.	Q3 11
The Grinder	TBA	TBA
Hard Grip: The Climbing Game	TBA	TBA
Jimmie Johnson's Anything with an Engine	Autumn	2011
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword	Nintendo	2011
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game	Disney	5/11
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	LucasArts	2/11
Major League Baseball 2K11	2K Sports	3/11
Man vs. Wild	Crave	3/11
NASCAR The Game 2011	Activision	2/11
NCIS	Ubisoft	2011
Pyroblazer	TBA	TBA
Rango The Video Game	Paramount Digital	3/11
Rock of the Dead	Conspiracy	2011
Sky Pirates of Neo Terra	Aspyr	TBA
SpongeBob SquarePants*	THQ	TBA
Stratusphere	TBA	TBA
Thor: God of Thunder	Sega	5/11
Top Spin 4	2K Sports	3/11
WWE All Stars	THQ	3/11

NINTENDO DS

Captain America: Super Soldier	Sega	7/11
de Blob 2	THQ	2/11
Disciples II	Strategy First	TBA
Doodle Hex	TBA	TBA
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation	Nintendo	2/11
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Chain Reaction	Deep Silver	TBA
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Critical Mass	Deep Silver	TBA
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Proving Grounds	Deep Silver	TBA
Gabrielle's Ghostly Groove	Natsume	2011
Ghostwire: Link to the Paranormal	TBA	TBA
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	Warner Bros.	Q3 11
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game	Disney	5/11
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	LucasArts	2/11
Monster Tale	Majesco	3/11
NCIS	Ubisoft	2011
Okamiden	Capcom	3/11
Pirate Battle	Orbital Media	TBA
Pokémon Black Version	Nintendo	3/11
Pokémon White Version	Nintendo	3/11
Radiant Historia	Atlus	2/11
Rango The Video Game	Paramount Digital	3/11
Thor: God of Thunder	Sega	5/11

NINTENDO 3DS

Animal Crossing*	Nintendo	TBA
Asphalt GT	Gameloft	TBA
Assassin's Creed Lost Legacy	Ubisoft	TBA
Baseball*	Konami	TBA
Batman*	Warner Bros.	TBA
Battle of Giants: Dinosaur Strike	Ubisoft	TBA
BloodRayne: The Shroud	Majesco	TBA
Bokujyoumonogatari 3D*	Marvelous	TBA
Bomberman*	Hudson	TBA
A Boy and His Blob	Majesco	TBA
Carnival Games*	Take-Two	TBA
Cartoon Network*	Crave	TBA
Chocobo Racing 3D*	Square Enix	TBA
Contra*	Konami	TBA
Crash-City GP	Rocket	TBA
cubic ninja	AQ	TBA
de Blob 2	THQ	TBA
Dead or Alive Dimensions	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Deca Sports*	Hudson	TBA
DJ Hero 3D	Activision	TBA
Dragon Ball*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Dragon Quest*	Square Enix	TBA
Driver Renegade	Ubisoft	TBA
Dynasty Warriors*	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Etrian Odyssey*	Atlus	TBA
Face Racers: Photo Finish	Majesco	TBA
FIFA Soccer*	Electronic Arts	TBA
Final Fantasy*	Square Enix	TBA
Frogger*	Konami	TBA
Gundam*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Hollywood '61*	Ubisoft	TBA
Kid Icarus: Uprising	Nintendo	TBA
Kingdom Hearts 3DS*	Square Enix	TBA
Kororinpa*	Hudson	TBA
Kung Fu Panda Kaboom of Doom	THQ	TBA
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D	Nintendo	TBA
LEGO*	Warner Bros.	TBA
Lion's Pride: Adventures in the Serengeti	Majesco	TBA
Lovely Lisa 3D	Tomy	TBA
Madden NFL Football	Electronic Arts	TBA
Mario Kart*	Nintendo	TBA
Martha Stewart	Majesco	TBA
Marvel Super Hero Squad: The Infinity Gauntlet	THQ	TBA
Mega Man Legends 3	Capcom	TBA
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater	Konami	TBA
My Garden	Electronic Arts	TBA
Naruto Shippuden Action	Tomy	TBA
Ninja Gaiden*	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Nintendogs + Cats	Nintendo	TBA
Pac-Man & Galaga*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Paper Mario*	Nintendo	TBA
The Penguins of Madagascar	THQ	TBA
PilotWings Resort	Nintendo	TBA
Pro Evolution Soccer*	Konami	TBA
Professor Layton and the Mask of Miracle*	Level-5	TBA
Puss N Boots	THQ	TBA
Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D	Capcom	TBA
Resident Evil Revelations	Capcom	TBA
Ridge Racer*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Saints Row: Drive-By	THQ	TBA
Samurai Warriors 3D*	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Shin Megami Tensei*	Atlus	TBA
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor*	Atlus	TBA
Shin Megami Tensei: Persona*	Atlus	TBA
The Sims 3	Electronic Arts	TBA
Sonic*	Sega	TBA
SpongeBob SquarePants*	THQ	TBA
Star Fox 64 3D	Nintendo	TBA
Steel Diver	Nintendo	TBA
Super Monkey Ball*	Sega	TBA
Super Robot*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Super Street Fighter IV 3D Edition*	Capcom	TBA
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Ubisoft	TBA
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	TBA
VS-robo	Rocket	TBA
WonderWorld Amusement Park	Majesco	TBA

READERS' MOST WANTED

Vote for your favorites at www.nintendopower.com/polls

Wii

1. The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword
2. de Blob 2
3. LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean
4. Conduit 2
5. LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars

NINTENDO DS

1. Pokémon Black Version/ Pokémon White Version
2. Okamiden
3. Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation
4. Monster Tale
5. de Blob 2

NINTENDO 3DS

1. Paper Mario*
2. Mario Kart*
3. The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D
4. Kid Icarus: Uprising
5. Star Fox 64 3D

RED TEXT = TITLES ADDED THIS MONTH. * TENTATIVE TITLE **NOTE:** RELEASE DATES OFTEN CHANGE.

DOWNLOAD

IN THIS SECTION

DSiWARE PREVIEW
Mighty Milky Way

DSiWARE/WiiWARE FEATURE
Music Apps

WiiWARE PREVIEW
Bit.Trip Flux

WiiWARE REVIEWS
- AIRPORT MANIA: FIRST FLIGHT
- FAMILY GAMES
- FROBOT
- HB ARCADE DISC GOLF
- LILT LINE
- RACERS' ISLANDS–CRAZY ARENAS
- VIOLIN PARADISE

VIRTUAL CONSOLE REVIEWS
- COMMANDO: WOLF OF THE BATTLEFIELD
- DARIUS TWIN
- MAGICAL DROP II
- SONSON
- SPIN MASTER

DSiWARE REVIEWS
- DAIROJO! SAMURAI DEFENDERS
- FRENZIC
- JUST SING! CHRISTMAS SONGS
- LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD'S ZOMBIE BBQ
- SPACE ACE
- SPOT IT! CHALLENGE
- SUPERMARKET MANIA
- TETRIS PARTY LIVE

Prepare for Planetary Pulverization!

Destroy worlds and hurtle through space in Mighty Milky Way, WayForward's pseudo-sequel to Mighty Flip Champs.

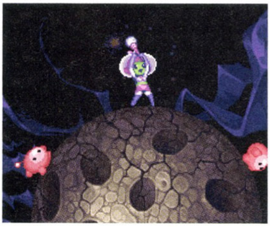
SOMETIMES YOU'VE GOTTA destroy a planet or two to get the job done. Just ask Samus Aran. Or Galactus. Or Luna—the green-skinned girl starring in WayForward's latest DSiWare project, Mighty Milky Way. But Luna isn't destroying planets to maintain universal peace or satiate her hunger—she's just destroying them to get where she needs to go. Admittedly, the planets are small, generally uninhabited, and very fragile (all it takes is two bounces off each planet's surface for it to explode), but her penchant for cheerful destruction is admirable nonetheless.

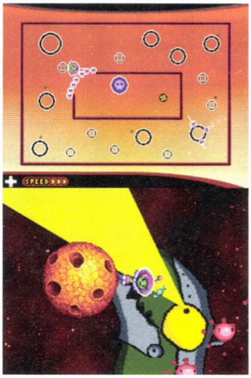
However, Luna can create planets, too—as long as she has some Planet Candy. Combine that with her ability to walk a complete 360 degrees around each planet (sort of like you can in Super Mario Galaxy, but in 2D) and Luna's got all the tools she needs to soar through 41 stages of puzzle-meets-platforming action. Like in Mighty Flip Champs (WayForward's 2009 DSiWare debut), the premise is simple—you need merely get Luna from the starting point in each nonlinear stage to the black hole at the end—as are the controls. Luna walks automatically (though you can adjust her speed), and you tap a planet to make Luna bounce off of it. You also touch the screen to create a new planet; the longer you touch the screen, the bigger the planet and the more intense its gravity.

Though the gameplay might sound basic, there are plenty of obstacles, enemies, and other elements to keep things interesting. Electrified barriers surround each stage, bouncy walls allow Luna to change her flight path, and various types of foes hover in space or walk on planets' surfaces. You can use enemies to your advantage, though—when Luna launches off a planet, the enemies launch as well, and you can knock them into each other to clear a path or slam them into an obstacle to get them out of the way. Sometimes you might have to knock a foe from planet to planet to get it where you can put it to use.

As you advance through the game, the obstacles get trickier. Spiked planets are deadly to touch but their gravity can be used to adjust Luna's trajectory, warp portals let you thoroughly explore levels, fields of space debris prevent you from creating planets in certain parts of space, and cannons can be used for high-speed space flight. And every 10 levels things get really intense: you're pursued by a giant cyborg dinosaur (simply named the T-Rex) that destroys each planet a few seconds after you land on it! Strangely enough, the T-Rex shows up in most of the game's postlevel cut-scenes, often sharing a soda or going to the movies with Luna.

Clearly Mighty Milky Way isn't a typical DSiWare title, so we spoke to the game's director, Sean Velasco, to find out more about this quirky, charming, and challenging game. —**CHRIS H.**





NINTENDO POWER **What inspired the gameplay concept of Mighty Milky Way?**

SEAN VELASCO We were trying to think of a game that could be best played with stylus pointing and touching when we stumbled upon this earth-shattering puzzle mechanic. We also wanted to make the main character someone who was not controllable. We liked the idea of zooming in and out all the time, so the player would need to consider each planet's mass and its effect on the player rather than just jumping from planet to planet.

What makes it the spiritual successor to Mighty Flip Champs?

We've been developing and tweaking this concept for more than a year. We thought a lot about how to tie it in to the Flip Champs universe, and what makes a "Mighty" game in the first place. We decided on a lot of elements: cute girl protagonist, actiony puzzle levels, retro sound effects, a loud color palette, and copious nonsense. Finally, there is the obligatory partner that is a dinosaur, or a fish man, or something...green, and sort of ugly? The fish man was one of my favorite parts of Mighty Flip Champs because it was so nonsensical, and the T-Rex is similar to him in a lot of ways. What kind of weird relationship do these characters have?

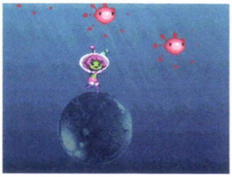
What kind of character is Luna? And why is she hopping around all of these planets?

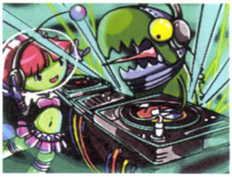
Luna is a cute little space alien with an important mission! She vacillates all the time between being steadfast in her determination, and listless at the pointlessness and chaos of existence.

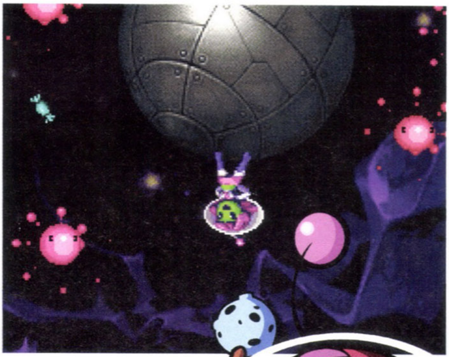
What's the deal with the T-Rex?

Luna and the T-Rex have a weird relationship. They are obviously a good couple; they spend a lot of time together. I think that Luna's free-spirited-but-frustrating attitude matches well with the T-Rex's hard-headed drive to get things done.

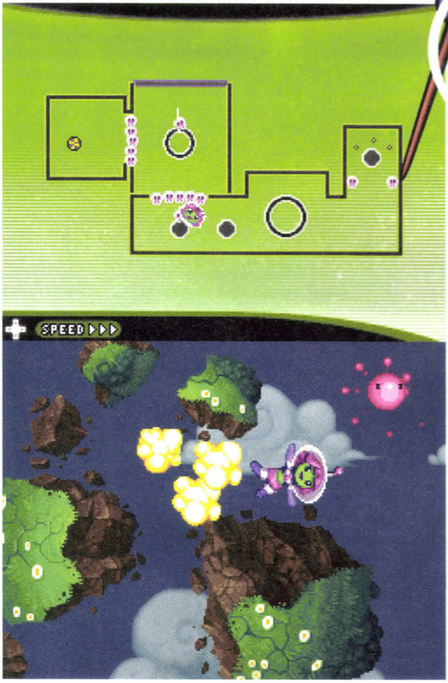
Then again, the T-Rex spends a lot of time trying to blow up the planets that Luna is walking on. Is that supposed to be cute in an elementary-school-hair-pulling kind of way? I don't really know, but it's not like she can just stand around and let him do that!

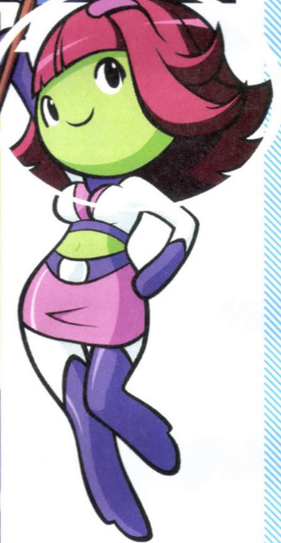






[Above] Luna and the T-Rex, on pretty much the weirdest date ever.





We noticed a poster of Alta in one of the cut-scenes. Are there any other direct references that Mighty Flip Champs fans can look forward to?

That might be it for Mighty Flip Champs, but word on the street is that Mighty Milky Way has a connection to another one of WayFoward's most beloved franchises....

The stages seem fairly straightforward. Are there additional elements or modes to challenge expert players?

Let's just say that the fun is only half over once you finish the game.

What about this game makes it ideal for DSiWare?

Everything! It's a weird little quirky idea that wouldn't necessarily find an audience on another platform.

What kind of gamers do you think this title will appeal to?

This game should appeal to any player that likes games that are experimental, bizarre, and awesome! Did I mention this game has amazing music? The vocal title song and vocal T-Rex ballad are so sweet that they make me tear up every time. Please enjoy this game when it comes out on the DSiWare service; it's been a memorable journey that we can't wait to share with you!

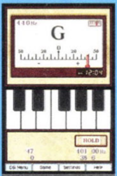
Ready to Rock

It's a great time to make music with DSiWare and WiiWare.

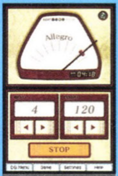
IF YOU'RE A musician (or musically inclined) and a gamer, it's likely you know how gratifying music technology can be; powerful tools that facilitate creativity are *fantastic*. You may not know, however, about the growing number of music-related applications available for download from the Nintendo DSi Shop and the Wii Shop Channel. If this is the case, read on for a tour through what's on offer! —**PATRICK C.**

SOMETHING FOR THE PLAYERS

Before delving into standalone music software, those of you who play instruments should know that a couple of first-party Nintendo titles offer undeniable utility to musicians looking to reduce the number of gadgets in their pockets.



Nintendo DSi Instrument Tuner



Nintendo DSi Metronome

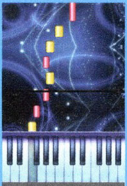
Nintendo DSi Instrument Tuner
Nintendo DSi Metronome

Publisher: **Nintendo**
Wii Points: **200 (each)**
Game ┼┼┼┼┼┼┼┼┼■ Tool
Quality: ♪♪♪♪♩

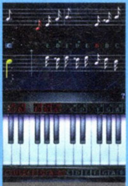
Nintendo DSi Instrument Tuner and Nintendo DSi Metronome provide tuner and metronome services, respectively. The tuner uses the system's built-in microphone to evaluate the pitch of notes played on acoustic instruments; a real-time display indicates the degree to which played notes are flat or sharp. The metronome will look familiar to anyone who's used one before, and it includes standard adjustments for modifying tempo and characterizing the beat. Both tools feature three graphic themes and a game designed to drill technique. The quality of the software is excellent, but one can't help but lament the fact that these aren't unified in a single download.

MUSICAL TINKER TOYS

To those of you who prefer your instruments virtual, or players who like to "doodle" while your instruments are out of reach, publisher Abylight has you in its sights! The Music On series offers stylus-controlled approximations of piano, keyboard, and guitar.



Music On: Playing Piano



Music On: Learning Piano

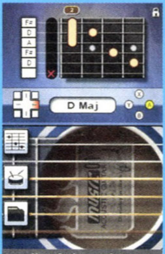
Music On: Playing Piano
Music On: Learning Piano

Publisher: **Abylight**
Nintendo DSi Points: **200 (each)**
Game ┼┼■┼┼┼┼┼┼┼ Tool
Quality: ♪♩♩♩♩

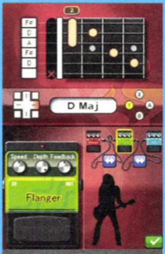
Playing Piano and Learning Piano are rhythm games designed to approximate piano practice. Playing Piano uses a familiar graphical cue system, while Learning Piano uses sheet music (and yes, it's ironically named, since anyone who hasn't already learned piano will feel fairly helpless). Both feature an assortment of public-domain music. Unfortunately, neither is particular useful, due to the disparity in technique between playing single notes with a stylus and playing polyphonically on a real piano. Also, neither is particularly fun, since it's difficult to read the incoming cues while keeping track of your stylus position against the virtual keys.

Music On: Acoustic Guitar
Music On: Electric Guitar

Publisher: **Abylight**
Nintendo DSi Points: **200 (each)**
Game ┼┼┼┼┼■┼┼┼┼ Tool
Quality: ♪♪♪♩♩

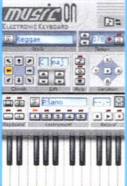


Music On: Acoustic Guitar

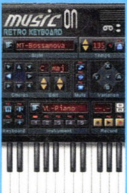


Music On: Electric Guitar

Abylight's guitar titles feature virtual guitars that can be strummed using the stylus. Fingerings are handled by the Control Pad, to which eight chords can be mapped. Acoustic Guitar offers programmable accompaniment similar to that of the keyboard titles, but Electric Guitar trades that functionality for a few stomp-box effects. Both would be of dubious usefulness if not for the screen devoted to mapping chords, which provides an excellent graphical chord database for a guitarist of a mind to study.



Music On: Electronic Keyboard



Music On: Retro Keyboard

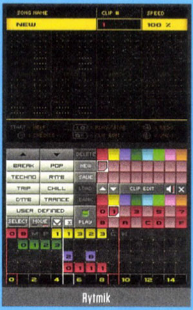
Music On: Electronic Keyboard
Music On: Retro Keyboard

Publisher: **Abylight**
Nintendo DSi Points: **200 (each)**
Game ┼┼┼■┼┼┼┼┼┼ Tool
Quality: ♪♪♪♩♩

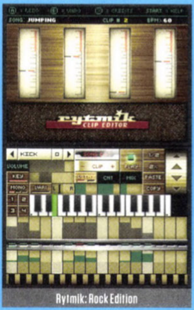
Abylight ups its game considerably with these keyboard titles, which effectively re-create the nostalgic grandeur of cheap Casio keyboards. Both titles feature a variety of familiar keyboard sounds (Retro Keyboard focuses on old-school synths) and programmable accompaniment in several styles. While the inability to play more than one note at a time severely limits the depth of play, anyone musically inclined will find ample fuel for amused noodling.

CASUAL COMPOSITION

Unlike guitar players, budding producers need not fret (ha!); titles devoted to loop-based song building can be had. Unlike the previous entries in our rundown, these programs endeavor to offer genuine compositional tools for people interested in writing music.



Rytmik



Rytmik: Rock Edition

Rytmik
Rytmik: Rock Edition

Publisher: Cinemax

Nintendo DSi Points: 800 (Rytmik) / 200 (Rytmik: Rock Edition)

Game ┼┼┼┼┼■┼┼┼┼ **Tool**

Quality: ♪♪♪♪♪

If you've worked with loops and samples, Rytmik will feel vaguely like home; that is, it features deep programmability locked within an arcane and inscrutable interface. Fortunately, time invested in penetrating that interface is well rewarded, as the creative potential here is huge! Composition is split between Song and Clip modes. From the Song Edit screen, loops from a variety of styles and instruments can be arranged in time across four tracks; this is where you'll write your tunes. Loops are often sample-based, but the ones here are programmed from instrument samples, which is awesome. Why? Because from the Clip Edit screen you can customize any of the vast number of included loops to suit your needs, or create your own loops from scratch. The compositional girth here is limitless. Of course, the original Rytmik is very limited in a stylistic sense; its loops are devoted to pop and dance music exclusively. To right that wrong, Cinemax recently released Rytmik: Rock Edition, which features rock-themed loops.

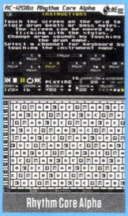
Rhythm Core Alpha

Publisher: SoftEgg

Nintendo DSi Points: 500

Game ┼┼┼┼┼┼■┼┼┼ **Tool**

Quality: ♪♪♪♪♪



Touch the screen on the grid to place drum beats or bass notes. The screen can be moved by flicking with the stylus. Change drum sounds by touching the drum name. Select a channel for keyboard by touching the instrument name.

Rhythm Core Alpha

So far we've covered performance- and composition-oriented apps. Rhythm Core Alpha occupies the DJ-filled turf between these extremes. It includes robust song-creation tools—including a staggering number of drum and instrument samples—but it adds performance-oriented features to broaden the experience. These features include the ability to jump from point to point in your composition during playback (to improvise your song on the fly), apply key changes in real time, and play instruments live over your backing track. As with Rytmik, the interface's learning curve will reap tears from your eyes, but the creative rewards make it hurt so good.

Copy Group
Group
Ungroup
Move
Zoom

Jam Space: PocketStudio

Jam Space: PocketStudio

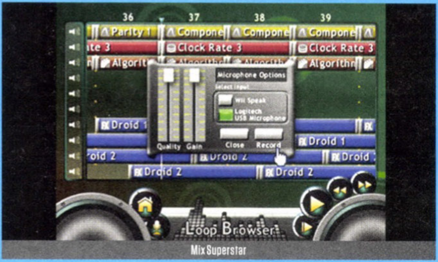
Publisher: HB Studios

Nintendo DSi Points: 500

Game ┼┼┼┼┼┼┼┼■┼┼ **Tool**

Quality: ♪♪♪♪♪

Loop-based composition is well and good, but MIDI sequencers have been around for decades for a reason; sometimes you just gotta write every part from scratch. Fortunately, PocketStudio caters to this more-traditional approach to song-building. In Quick Jam mode, composers looking to jot down flashes of inspiration can use a combination of chord/pattern mapping and stylus tapping/strumming to capture live instrument performances (building songs by overlapping performances). In Studio Session mode, composers build instrument parts from scratch using a surprisingly full-featured MIDI sequencer. With its deep potential for freeform writing and relatively high audio fidelity, PocketStudio gets you closer to the "band in a studio" experience than anything else on our list.



Mix Superstar

Mix Superstar

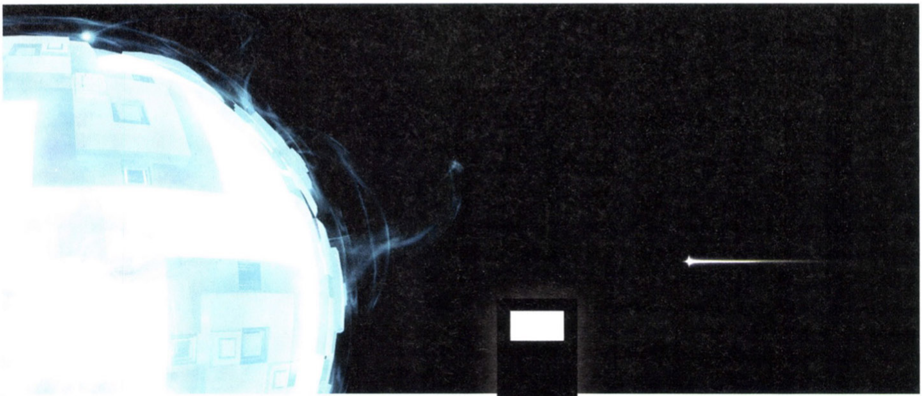
Publisher: Digital Leisure

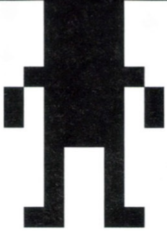
Wii Points: 500

Game ┼┼┼┼┼┼┼┼■┼┼ **Tool**

Quality: ♪♪♪♪♪

While downloadable music software for Nintendo systems is undeniably geared toward mobile musicians, the couch-bound do have an option in WiiWare title Mix Superstar. (Though it's the only game in town, it brings so much to the table you're unlikely to curse the lack of competition.) In spirit Mix Superstar resembles Rytmik; it's a loop-based song-creation tool focused on composition rather than performance. Unlike Rytmik, though, Mix Superstar has a fairly intuitive interface, so building songs will leave you with considerably fewer teeth piled at your feet. The default loop libraries include several instruments (including vocals) spread across the dance, hip-hop, and techno genres. (Additional loop libraries from a variety of genres can be purchased with Wii Points from an in-app store.) Generally, Mix Superstar is great fun to use, but a few key features elevate it well past the other titles in our list. First, vocal tracks can be recorded via Wii Speak or a Logitech USB mic. Second, tracks can be shared with friends via WiiConnect24 (this feature can be used for collaborative song writing). Third, online servers allow songs to be transferred to PCs for listening and distribution. Finally, and most importantly, Mix Superstar's loops are royalty-free; this means you can sell *your songs* without getting in hot water. In other words, you can make real music with this. How cool is that?





Flux Capacity

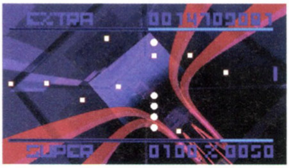
Gaijin Games returns to its roots to finish off its trippy WiiWare series with Bit.Trip Flux.

ALL GOOD THINGS, it has been said, must come to an end. It would seem that even popular WiiWare series aren't immune to this old adage, as the upcoming Bit.Trip Flux marks the end of the six-part Bit.Trip saga that began in early 2009 with the WiiWare release of Bit.Trip Beat. For the uninitiated, the Bit.Trip series explores multiple gameplay genres, with a healthy dose of retro-inspired visuals and pounding techno music that is deeply entwined with the onscreen action. Even if you don't always directly control him, the star of each of the titles is the mysterious CommanderVideo, who the series's creator, Alex Neuse, describes as "a 12-foot-tall naked black man with one giant visor-shaped eye."

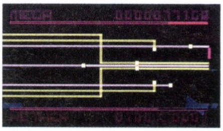
Although each of the first five games in the series plays quite differently, Flux harkens back to Beat, which plays like a modern-day homage to the arcade classic Pong. Neuse explains this return to form thusly: "Bit.Trip Flux marks the completion of CommanderVideo's journey; and it's a journey that comes full-circle. Like the player, CommanderVideo has experienced and learned so much over the course of the series, but in the end, realizes that no matter how things change, there is always an underlying simplicity to everything."

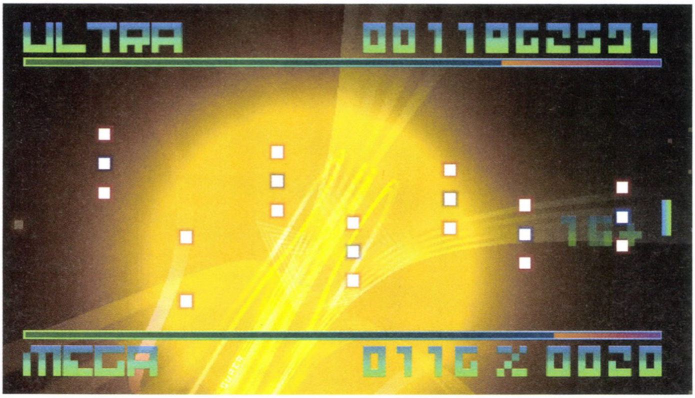
At first glance Flux is a lot like Beat, albeit with the paddle on the right side of the screen instead of the left. The player controls the paddle by tilting the Wii Remote controller up and down. The goal is to simply bounce back the square-shaped Beats that fly at you from the left. Doing so not only boosts your score and combo meter, but each successfully repelled Beat adds a layer to the game's soundtrack. Power-up items can be grabbed as well, altering your paddle and mak-

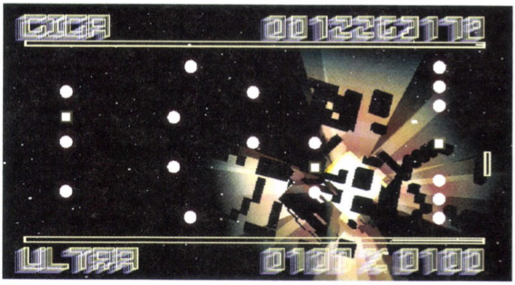
[Below] The better you play, the crazier the background visual effects will become.



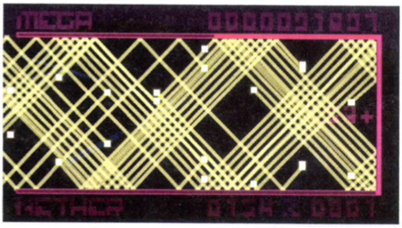
SUPER
HYPER
0100 x 0010







[Below] See that pink bar on the right? That's actually your paddle, powered up so it fills the entire height of the play field!



ing it easier (or occasionally more difficult) to hit the Beats.

Flux is not just a rehash, though. Neuse explains, "Flux, while very similar to Beat, has definitely evolved in a few small but meaningful ways. We've added a few features that debuted in other games in the series, and I think it makes the game a very nice companion to Beat."

Among these new features are some very welcome midlevel checkpoints. Although Flux is certainly not an easy game, mistakes aren't as harshly punished as they were in Beat. "While we really like the endurance gameplay in Bit.Trip Beat," says Neuse, "it's just not as forgiving as most people like their games to be these days. So, we met in the middle. While you still have to make it through a whole level in one sitting, if you run into problems, you don't have to start over from the beginning now."

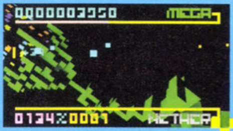
In addition to the more accessible challenge, there are new types of Beats to confound players—most notably the Blobs (circular Beats that must be avoided) and Bonuses (optional faded Beats that are difficult to repel, but reward extra points to the skilled player). Another new type of Beat, when struck, bursts into several new Beats that must also be repelled. While discussing the features in Flux, Neuse points out, "Most of the inspiration for gameplay changes came from our experiences working on all the other Bit.Trip games and the feedback we've gotten from our wonderful fans."

With only three stages (dubbed Epiphany, Perception, and Catharsis), Bit.Trip Flux might sound a tad short, but don't discount the game's considerable difficulty or the fact that it is meant to be replayed in an attempt to best your top score. Neuse considers Flux a bit of a homecoming for fans of Bit.Trip Beat, and although we have been assured that this is definitely the final title in the Bit.Trip saga, it may not be the end of CommanderVideo.

As Neuse explains, "We do love CommanderVideo a lot. While we've got lots of ideas for other Bit.Trip games, the primary story, and therefore the series proper, is done. I want everyone to know that CommanderVideo never has and never will live only within Bit.Trip. We have other plans for the good commander." **—PHIL T.**

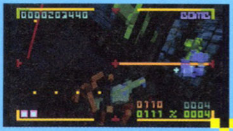
Bit.Trip Timeline

The tale of CommanderVideo has been told throughout the course of six games. Bit.Trip Flux is the final chapter, but let's not forget the commander's previous adventures.



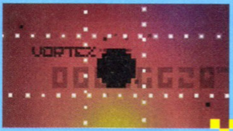
TITLE: BIT.TRIP BEAT • RELEASE DATE: MARCH 16, 2009

The first Bit.Trip title introduced the world to CommanderVideo while drawing inspiration from such classic arcade games as Pong and Arkanoid. The wild behavior of the different types of blocks that fly toward your paddle keep the challenge level high, and the fantastic soundtrack keeps us coming back for more.



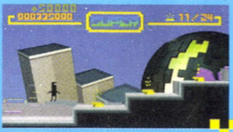
TITLE: BIT.TRIP CORE • RELEASE DATE: JULY 6, 2009

Although all of the Bit.Trip games feature a strong focus on music, Core is the only entry to actually tackle the rhythm genre. Like that of its brethren, though, the action is trimmed down to the bare essentials. The player controls a cross in the center of the screen that shoots beams to destroy Beats that fly out from the sides of the screen.



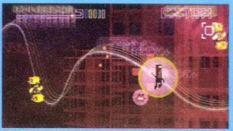
TITLE: BIT.TRIP VOID • RELEASE DATE: NOVEMBER 23, 2009

In Void, the player controls a small black circle while black and white Beats move across the screen. Touching the black Beats causes the player's circle to grow. The larger it gets, the more points you earn. Of course, this also makes it much more difficult to avoid the hazardous white Beats.



TITLE: BIT.TRIP RUNNER • RELEASE DATE: MAY 17, 2010

Bit.Trip Runner marked the first time you directly controlled CommanderVideo. In this platformer, the commander endlessly runs across a variety of dangerous environments, requiring the player to jump, slide, and kick past any obstacles that wind up in his path. The game also features bonus levels inspired by Activision's hit Atari 2600 game Pitfall!

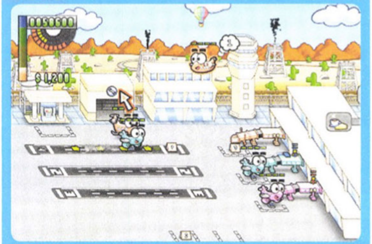


TITLE: BIT.TRIP FATE • RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 25, 2010

The penultimate Bit.Trip title is a take on the shooter genre: CommanderVideo travels along a rail that twists and turns through each level. Using either the Wii Remote and Nunchuk controllers or the analog sticks of the Classic Controller, the player moves the commander while firing in any direction.

EVALUATION STATION

WiiWARE



AIRPORT MANIA: FIRST FLIGHT

PUBLISHER: **LEMON GAMES** GENRE: **ALTERNATIVE** Wii POINTS: **500**

Complete with its cute little planes, popular PC and handheld time-management game Airport Mania: First Flight has landed on WiiWare. Airport Mania puts you in the shoes of an air-traffic controller managing incoming and outgoing flights, awarding you cash (used as a scoring system and to upgrade your airport) based on how smoothly your flights are going. Although the concept may not sound so interesting (airports are boring!), managing your planes with point-and-click simplicity allows the game to build up in difficulty at a gentle yet satisfying pace, leading to some particularly hectic situations that are as challenging as they are fun. —CODY M.

Recommended

WiiWARE

FAMILY GAMES

PUBLISHER: **ICON GAMES ENTERTAINMENT**
GENRE: **BOARD GAME**
Wii POINTS: **500**

Offering a solid mix of classic board and pen-and-paper games—Battlefleet, Squares, Matchsticks, Hangman, 4-in-a-Row, Morris, Noughts and Crosses, and Safecracker—wrapped in a fun drawings-on-crumpled-notebook-paper art style, Family Games is hard to knock from a value standpoint. By the time you've exhausted all the options for tweaking game rules and exploring multiplayer (up to four participants), it's hard to knock from any standpoint. —PATRICK C.

Recommended

WiiWARE

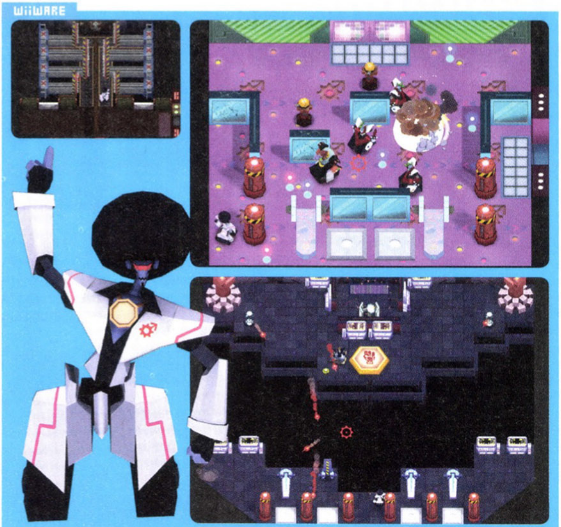
HB ARCADE DISC GOLF

PUBLISHER: **HB STUDIOS**
GENRE: **SPORTS**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

On one hand, this is cartoon-style disc (aka, Frisbee) golf with solid graphics, decent Wii Remote handling, and strong multiplayer potential (up to four players). On the other hand, the steep price gets you only two courses (nine holes each), and you're expected to pay for additional courses (none are available at the time of writing). This would be OK if not for the fact that the holes are fairly homogenous and rely too much on out-of-bounds hazards. —PATRICK C.

Hmmm...

WiiWARE



FROBOT

PUBLISHER: **FUGAZO** GENRE: **ADVENTURE**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

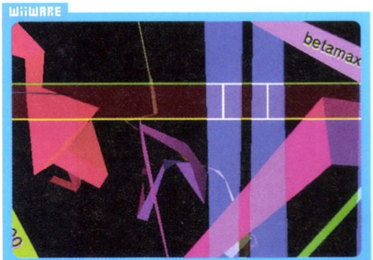
Given Frobot's goofy setup (you control a disco-loving, womanizing robot with an afro), you might think the developers would coast by on the premise alone and not worry about how good the actual gameplay is. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The silly humor belies some serious (and seriously challenging) action that's equal parts top-down shooter and environmental-puzzle game. In fact, if anything seems out of place, it's the forced jive-talk that doesn't really fit in with the explosive combat and industrial surroundings. On the other hand, the disco-inspired soundtrack is rather catchy.

Regardless of whether or not the funky theme is what brings you to Frobot, the gameplay will keep you coming back for more. The point-and-shoot action (you move with the Nunchuk controller while aiming with the Wii Remote) is solid, and a growing arsenal of weapons (including mines, missiles, and a guided explosive called the Jive Stalker) keep things interesting. But the clever Zeldalike puzzles are the real star; there are switches to activate, blocks to move, walls to knock over, energy fields to overcome, and much more. Your weapons come into play as well; you'll have to ricochet your standard shots into tricky locations, rely on mines as your only weapons when inhibitors prevent you from using projectiles, dash across moving platforms, and maneuver the Jive Stalker through gauntlets of obstacles. The puzzles, especially in the later levels, require both skill and smarts to overcome, and if you want to find the hidden goodies in each level (which help unlock weapon upgrades) you'll really be put to the test. Certainly, there's room for improvement, though—the physics-based aspects of some puzzles, for example, should have been scripted. It's pretty annoying to have to repeatedly retry a task just because your placement of a block on a catapult wasn't pixel-perfect.

Despite some rough edges, the solo portion of Frobot is solid fun, and it's augmented by a slick four-player versus mode containing additional weapons that aren't in the single-player game. Though versus mode isn't especially deep, it's enjoyable if you like chaotic action, and it adds a lot of replay value to the overall package. —CHRIS H.

Recommended

WiiWARE



LILT LINE

PUBLISHER: **GAIJIN GAMES** GENRE: **RHYTHM** Wii POINTS: **500**

Gaijin Games has brought us this WiiWare version of developer Different Cloth's music-infused iPhone rhythm/racing game, Lilt Line. Although it's not one of Gaijin's original titles, its stylish, minimalistic visuals and trippy soundtrack allow it to fit right in with Gaijin's Bit.Trip series. The simple controls, which have you moving a line through increasingly tricky mazes, work perfectly with the Wii Remote. Although the game's challenge ramps up pretty quickly, with only 15 relatively brief levels, the game is over far too soon. Also, the scoring method—you begin each level with a maximum score and each mistake costs you points—doesn't make high-score runs terribly exciting. **—PHIL T.**

Hmmm...

VIRTUAL CONSOLE

COMMANDO: WOLF OF THE BATTLEFIELD

PLATFORM: **ARCADE**
PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
GENRE: **SHOOTER**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1985**

Commando is one of the games that defined the top-down run-'n'-gun genre, but it hasn't aged particularly gracefully. The action is certainly fast and relentless, but the graphics are nothing special, and in a day when dual-stick auto-rapid fire is the norm, the game is especially tasking on the thumbs. It's also quite short from beginning to end, but the challenge lies in surviving multiple sequential playthroughs. **—CHRIS H.**

Hmmm...

VIRTUAL CONSOLE

DARIUS TWIN

PLATFORM: **SUPER NES** PUBLISHER: **TAITO**
GENRE: **SHOOTER** ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1991**

Even if you already own a few side-scrolling shooters on Virtual Console, Darius Twin makes a fine addition to your library. The control is remarkably smooth, the graphics are detailed, the soundtrack is rockin', and the two-player simultaneous co-op is a nice touch that takes the game a notch above most shooters of its day. Then, of course, there's the amusing fact that all of the bosses and most of the minor enemies are robotic sea creatures (although whether that's good or bad probably depends on if you're an icthyophobe). But be warned: like most old-school shooters, the game is pretty tough. **—CHRIS H.**

Recommended

WiiWARE

RACERS' ISLANDS–CRAZY ARENAS

PUBLISHER: **ZALLAG**
GENRE: **RACING**
Wii POINTS: **600**

The previous Racers' Islands title was an awful take on the Mario Kart formula. This new entry in the series is an awful take on Mario Kart's Battle mode. There are five battle types to choose from, but each has only one arena. The modes are fairly standard stuff, with only a hockey-style game standing out as even mildly entertaining. Poor controls and glitchy opponent AI drag a merely mediocre game into the "bad" zone. **—PHIL T.**

Grumble Grumble

WiiWARE

VIOLIN PARADISE

PUBLISHER: **KEYSTONE GAME STUDIO**
GENRE: **RHYTHM**
Wii POINTS: **700**

Let's get this out of the way: more like...Violin *Hell*! This is "Violin Hero" with an eye toward awfulness. Two stage-types compete for your disdain: conductor stages (in theory) require you to wave the Wii Remote like a baton—in practice you'll simply twitch periodically to keep the music rolling. Violin mode is similarly hamstrung; controls designed to ape violin-playing track so poorly it's impossible to tell how your actions impact your results. **—PATRICK C.**

Grumble Grumble

VIRTUAL CONSOLE

MAGICAL DROP II

PLATFORM: **NEOGEO**
PUBLISHER: **D4 ENTERPRISE/ DATA EAST**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1993**

The Magical Drop series plays like a hybrid of Puyo Pop and Bust-a-Move. The games have always been fun and challenging, and Magical Drop II is no exception. It is, however, somewhat difficult to recommend this relatively bare-bones entry in the series when its vastly improved sequel is currently available (along with 14 other games) in the retail Wii compilation Data East Arcade Classics for only $20. **—PHIL T.**

Hmmm...

VIRTUAL CONSOLE

SONSON

PLATFORM: **ARCADE**
PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
GENRE: **PLATFORMER**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1984**

As Capcom's second video game ever, SonSon has a bit of history behind it. It also holds up fairly well considering its age. Loosely based on a Chinese legend, *Journey to the West*, the game's autoscrolling ensures that the action is always fast-paced, but its simple and repetitive nature means you probably won't come back to it much. Only hardcore fans of mildly obscure retro arcade titles should bother. **—PHIL T.**

Hmmm...

VIRTUAL CONSOLE

SPIN MASTER

PLATFORM: **NEOGEO**
PUBLISHER: **D4 ENTERPRISE/ DATA EAST**
GENRE: **ACTION**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1993**

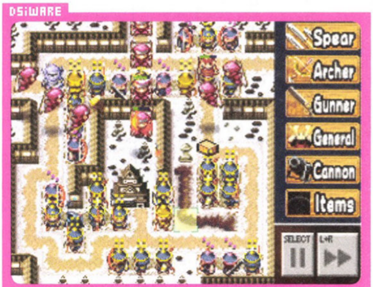
Despite this game's title, Spin Master isn't about spinning anything (unless you consider that your default attack utilizes a yo-yo). Instead, it's a traditional side-scrolling action-platformer with co-op play, a solid assortment of weapons, and bold, cartoony graphics. However, there isn't anything in this game that hasn't been done elsewhere. Spin Master isn't bad, but it's fairly generic. **—CHRIS H.**

Hmmm...

EVALUATION STATION

WiiWARE
VIRTUAL CONSOLE
DSiWARE

DSiWARE



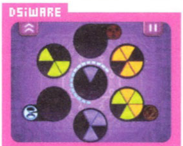
DAIROJO! SAMURAI DEFENDERS

PUBLISHER: **ABYLIGHT** GENRE: **STRATEGY** NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **800**

It may be an exaggeration, but it feels like every other DSiWare title is a tower-defense game. Dairojo! Samurai Defenders is as fine an example of the genre as any, featuring charming graphics and solid-yet-uninspired gameplay. Those who have yet to try a tower-defense game could certainly do worse. But with this game's higher level of challenge and more expensive price tag than others in the field, you may want to check out one of the many other options available. —**JUSTIN C.**

Hmmm...

DSiWARE



FRENZIC

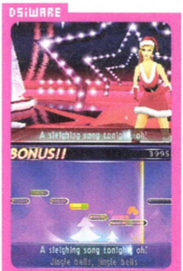
PUBLISHER: **TWO TRIBES**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**
NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **200**

If the myriad mediocre mind-meddlers just aren't satiating that ever-expanding noggin' of yours, then give this unique puzzle game a try. Frenzic provides a moderately deep puzzle mechanic based on shape and color matching. The game is just right for five-minute distractions, despite its background music and overall visuals being a bit dull. It's definitely worth a try for any puzzle fan looking for his next fix.

—**DAVID M.**

Recommended

DSiWARE


A sleighing song tonight, oh!
BONUS!!
3995
A sleighing song tonight, oh!
Jingle bells, jingle bells

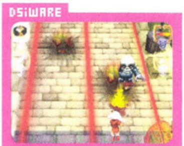
JUST SING! CHRISTMAS SONGS

PUBLISHER: **ENGINE SOFTWARE**
GENRE: **RHYTHM**
NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **200**

A holiday-themed karaoke game is a decent idea, but with this meager selection of only two songs, you'll be finished in less than five minutes. It's also weird watching the onscreen dancer, a girl in a skimpy Santa suit, bump and grind to "Silent Night." —**PHIL T.**

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE



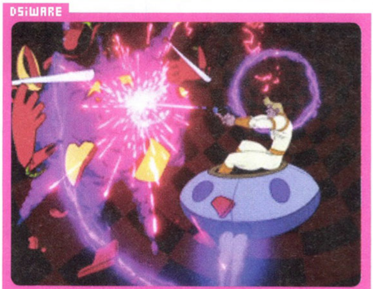
LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD'S ZOMBIE BBQ

PUBLISHER: **GAMMICK ENTERTAINMENT**
GENRE: **SHOOTER**
NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **800**

As you can surmise from its title, Little Red Riding Hood's Zombie BBQ isn't meant to be taken especially seriously. This fairytale-inspired shooter is chock-full of goofy humor, intense action, and explosive weaponry. If you missed this game when it was a retail product, you'd do well to check it out in DSiWare form, but if you own the original there's not much to see here. —**CHRIS H.**

Recommended

DSiWARE



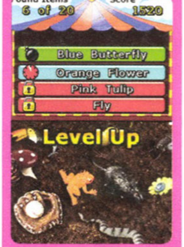
SPACE ACE

PUBLISHER: **DIGITAL LEISURE** GENRE: **ACTION** NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **800**

Space Ace is the second of Don Bluth's classic laser-disc arcade titles to come to DSiWare. (Dragon's Lair was the first.) Like its predecessor's, Ace's gameplay is fairly dated. The simple reaction-based controls rely more on memorization than actual skill, and they take a backseat to the stunning animation. Even so, the ability to periodically transform the main character from a scrawny wimp into a muscle-bound hero creates branching paths, adding to the replay value. The script is also pretty funny, making this game more fun to play than Dragon's Lair. The video and sound are a bit compressed, but they're still very impressive for a DSiWare game. —**PHIL T.**

Recommended

DSiWARE



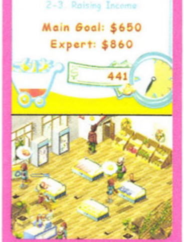
SPOT IT! CHALLENGE

PUBLISHER: **BIG JOHN GAMES**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**
NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **200**

Find-the-hidden-object games aren't terribly exciting to begin with, but Spot It! Challenge jumps from dull to tedious due to a limited view of the playfield that requires you to constantly pan the camera. A camera-zoom option would have improved things tremendously. —**CHRIS H.**

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE



SUPERMARKET MANIA

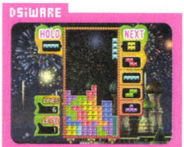
PUBLISHER: **G5 ENTERTAINMENT AB**
GENRE: **ALTERNATIVE**
NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **500**

As one of those "customer service/time- and resource-management" games, Supermarket Mania is fairly competent. It has a good number of levels and some fun challenges, but the ugly, muddy graphics often get in the way of the action.

—**PHIL T.**

Hmmm...

DSiWARE



TETRIS PARTY LIVE

PUBLISHER: **TETRIS ONLINE**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**
NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **500**

This truncated version of the DS game Tetris Party Deluxe may lack many of Deluxe's gameplay types, but the included Marathon and Computer Battle modes still make for a great game of Tetris. The low price is good for those looking for a quick falling-block fix. Perhaps the game's main draw is the online multiplayer mode, which supports up to four people at once. Pity there's no support for local multiplayer. —**PHIL T.**

Recommended

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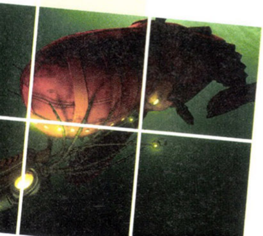

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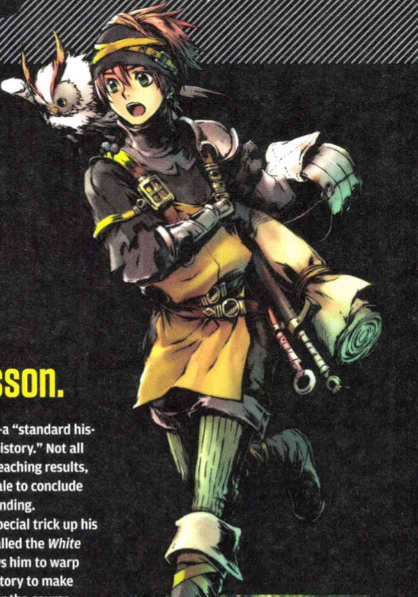
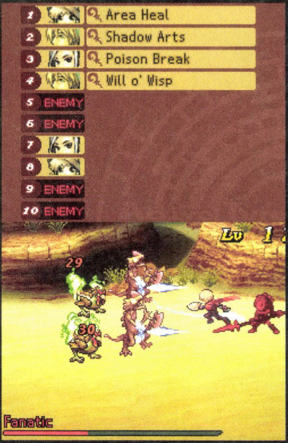
RADIANT HISTORIA



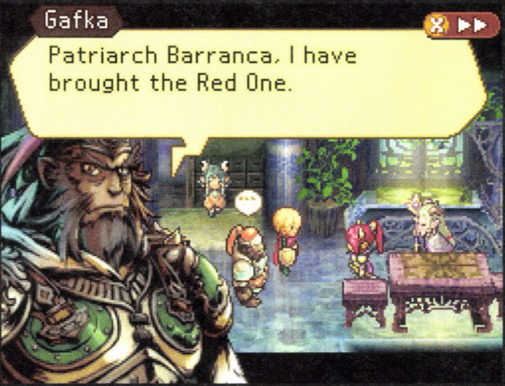
It's time to teach history a lesson.

ARE YOU TIRED of role-playing games in which the choices are meaningless? You know what I'm referring to—games that give you a yes-or-no question but don't let you proceed until you pick *yes*, or even worse, allow you to pick *no* but the game advances as if you'd selected yes anyway. That's certainly not an issue in Radiant Historia. In this latest epic from Atlus nearly every choice has a meaningful consequence. Early in the game, for example, the protagonist, Stocke, has the option of remaining a Special Intelligence operative or becoming vice commander of a new military brigade. Your selection leads to two very different paths—a "standard history" and an "alternate history." Not all decisions have such far-reaching results, but they may cause the tale to conclude prematurely with a bad ending.

Luckily, Stocke has a special trick up his sleeve: a magical tome called the *White Chronicle*. The book allows him to warp to crucial junctures in history to make different choices and alter the course of events. And in a world as troubled as Vainqueur—where the nations of Alistel and Granorg are engaged in nonstop war, and the phenomenon of desertification is turning the

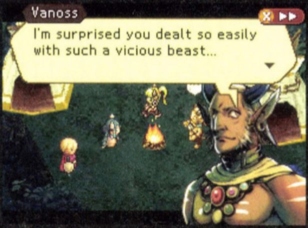


[Below] In the kingdom of Celestia, you'll find gorillas in your midst.



Gafka

Patriarch Barranca, I have brought the Red One.



Vanoss

I'm surprised you dealt so easily with such a vicious beast...

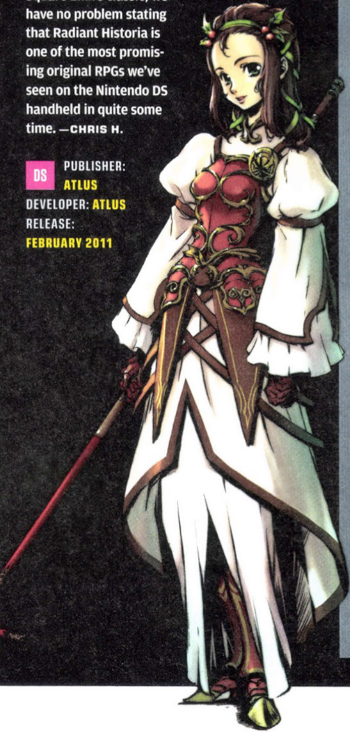
continent into a wasteland—you'll need every opportunity you can get to set things right.

Although Stocke is a loyal Alistel citizen—and Alistel appears much more benevolent than Granorg, which is ruled by the selfish Queen Protea—the events that unfold cause allegiances to change rapidly. Despite the game's colorful, cartoony visuals, Radiant Historia's plot is fairly heavy stuff, chock-full of betrayal and political intrigue. Depending on whether you follow the path of the military or of Special Intelligence, you may find that supposed allies are actually enemies, or that you and your purported foes share common goals. Eventually, Stocke even ends up joining forces with Granorg's Princess Eruca, who secretly leads a resistance movement that plans to depose her stepmother. Things aren't black and white in Vainqueur.

Surviving long enough to learn everyone's true intentions, however, is no easy task—that's where the *White Chronicle* comes in. For instance, at one point Stocke finds himself trapped when a saboteur's bombs damage the fortress he's stationed in; to make it out, he'll have to go back in time and use his knowledge of the future to find and disarm the bombs. But you won't move only back and forth through time; you'll also move sideways from the "standard history" to the "alternate history." The two continuities allow you to learn different information and acquire different abilities that you can then take from one continuity to the other and use to your benefit. Can't get through an enemy castle? Then you'd best warp to the "alternate history" so you can learn a stealth skill. By bouncing between the two timelines you'll learn a number of such techniques, such as pushing heavy boxes, detonating explosive barrels, seeing hidden objects, cutting through vines, and more. You'll get to use a number of abilities in the game's unique grid-based combat system, as well.

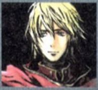
Between Radiant Historia's innovative gameplay and its time-travel hook, many RPG enthusiasts are ready to call it the modern-day equivalent of Chrono Trigger. While we're not quite prepared to put it in the same class as Square Enix's classic, we have no problem stating that Radiant Historia is one of the most promising original RPGs we've seen on the Nintendo DS handheld in quite some time. —CHRIS H.

DS PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **ATLUS**
RELEASE: **FEBRUARY 2011**

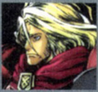


HEROES OF HISTORIA

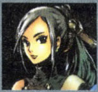
Take a look at a few of the characters who are crucial to Vainqueur's future.



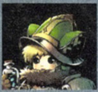
STOCKE The game's hero, Stocke, is an Alistel soldier who gains possession of the *White Chronicle* and acquires the ability to travel through time. He's good at his job, but he's fairly stoic.



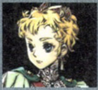
ROSCH Stocke's best friend. A severe injury cost him his arm, but it's been replaced with a mechanical one. Nonetheless, he's a fierce warrior and a natural leader.



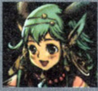
RAYNIE A former mercenary, Raynie is a young fighter assigned to work under Stocke. She's talkative and loyal, and skilled in elemental magic.



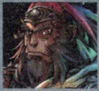
MARCO Despite his small stature, Marco is a reliable soldier. Like his partner Raynie, Marco was a mercenary until his unit was wiped out under mysterious circumstances.



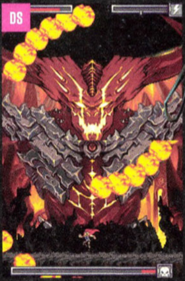
ERUCA Eruca is the princess of Granorg. Unlike her stepmother, Queen Protea, Eruca genuinely wants to help her country's citizens.



AHT Aht is a young girl from the Satyros tribe. Thanks to special powers that allow her to see hidden truths, she's much wiser than her happy-go-lucky attitude indicates.



GAFKA Hailing from a tribe of beastmen known as the Gutral, the apelike Gafka is a powerhouse fighter. He's secretive about his past.



THOR: GOD OF THUNDER

Sega's latest Marvel game brings the thunder.

IT'S A LITTLE shocking that Marvel's Thor hasn't gotten a video game of his own until now. The Thor universe is chockablock with fantastical characters and locales that should make for a grand adventure. When Thor: God of Thunder is released on Wii and DS to coincide with the Odinson's motion-picture debut, we'll find out if the games live up to that potential.

What we've seen thus far certainly looks promising. On Wii, Red Fly Studio (developer of Mushroom Men and the Wii version of Ghostbusters: The Video Game) and Sega have made a concerted effort to create an entertaining experience regardless of the game's ties with the movie.

[Below] Thor isn't afraid to hit below the belt.

In fact, other than characters' likenesses and movie actors Chris Hemsworth and Tom Hiddleston voicing Thor and Loki, respectively, the game isn't really connected to the flick. In the home-console adventure, the frost giants invade Asgard, so Loki convinces Thor to retaliate and attack the frost giant's home world, Niflheim. Fighting frost giants is as simple as tapping A or swinging the Wii Remote controller like Thor's hammer. There's more strategy than that, of course, with the addition of blocking and reversing. Plus, the Wii game emphasizes building combos; once you fill up the combo meter, your God Powers become stronger. Your lightning God Power hits only nearby enemies when used normally, for example, but it strikes all the baddies onscreen with a full combo meter.

The DS version shares the same basic story, but it plays out like the 2D action games of yesteryear—which makes sense, as it is being made by Contra 4 and Shantae: Risky's Revenge developer WayForward Technologies. The handheld game doesn't have the combo meter of its Wii sibling, but combos still play an important role: you can knock an enemy from the bottom screen to the top screen, clobber him some more in midair, then smash him to the ground, unleashing a shockwave that smacks anyone unlucky enough to be beneath your hammer. The DS handheld's screens are also used to great effect when facing off against bosses such as the dual screen–filling Surtur.

—**JUSTIN C.**

Wii DS **PUBLISHER: SEGA**
DEVELOPER: RED FLY STUDIO (Wii)/WAYFORWARD TECHNOLOGIES (DS)
RELEASE: MAY 2011

TOP SPIN 4

Getting back into the swing of things

BNP PARIBAS
changing world

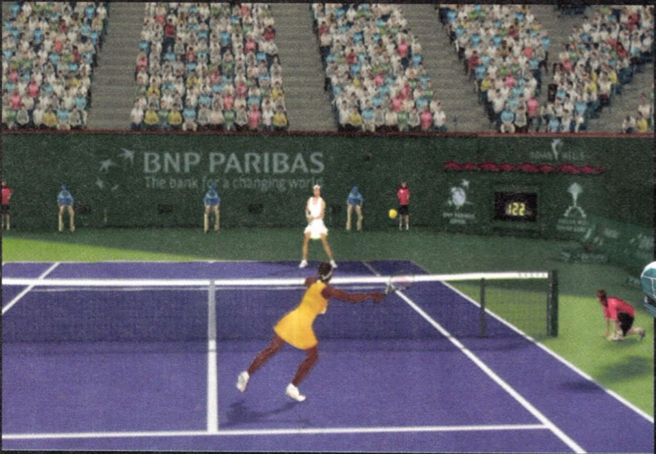
TENNIS SEEMS LIKE the ultimate no-brainer for the Wii console. Lots of game companies obviously concur, and have put forth some solid representations of the sport. To our minds, though, nobody has truly aced it yet. Can the team at 2K Sports be the first? At the very least, Top Spin 4 looks like a significant improvement over its predecessor.

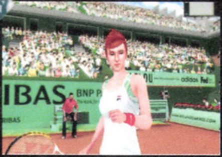
The philosophy behind this offering is to make it accessible enough for anyone to play while still delivering an authentic simulation for the hardcore fans. The latter part of that equation starts with what 2K boasts is the deepest player roster in a tennis game to date. The lineup consists of current ATP stars like Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, and Andy Roddick; female pros like Jelena Jankovic, Serena Williams, and Caroline Wozniacki; and such legends as Andre Agassi, Pete Sampras, Michael Chang, and Björn Borg. Some impressive facial modeling and signature animations make each player likeness remarkably convincing. More importantly, the development team is putting a lot of effort into ensuring that AI competitors play like their real-life counterparts, forcing you to make adjustments based on your opponent.

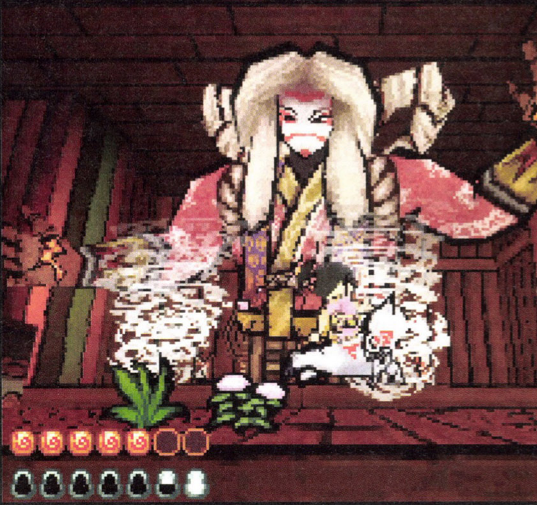
The game's motion controls offer quite a bit of depth, as well. Shots are affected by the speed and trajectory with which you swing the Wii Remote, and you can further modify them by holding the A Button for a lob or the B Button for a flat shot. Once you've initiated a swing, you can also aim your shot by tilting the Control Stick. Unfortunately, Top Spin 4 won't be compatible with the Wii MotionPlus accessory. Don't get us wrong; the controls felt good without it during our brief play test, but utilizing the peripheral could have made the experience even better.

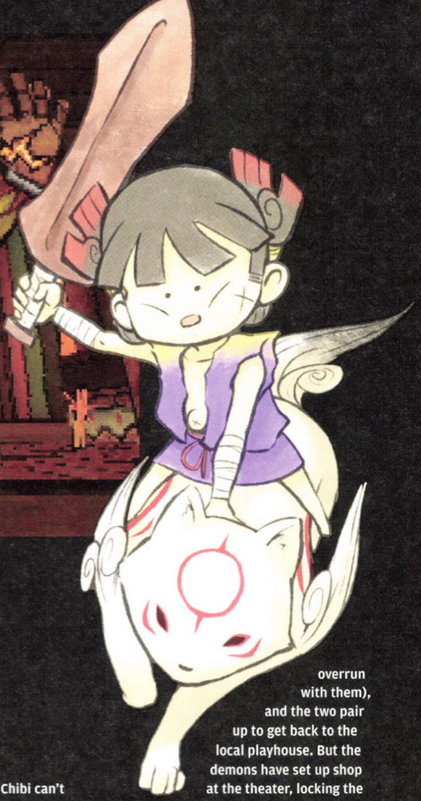
On the bright side, the developers are promising a far more robust package than what was found in the barebones Wii version of Top Spin 3. They plan to include both a player creator and a full-fledged career mode this time around, as well as a new King of the Court mode for highly customizable multiplayer tournaments. We're told to expect other additions, as well, but the team is keeping those details close to the vest for now. —STEVE T.

Wii
PUBLISHER: **2K SPORTS**
DEVELOPER: **2K CZECH**
RELEASE: **MARCH 2011**









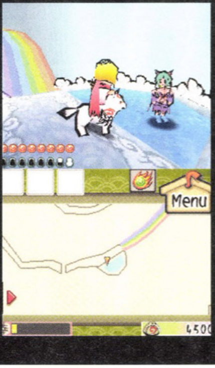
OKAMIDEN

We get drawn deeper into Capcom's stylish action-adventure game.

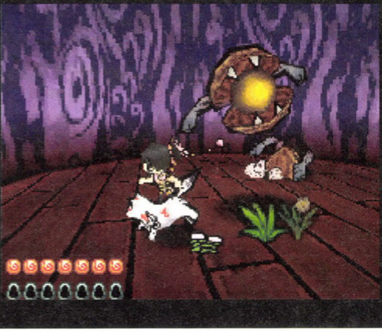
OF ALL THE titles on the horizon for the Nintendo DS system, Okamiden may be the most exciting. (Just look at all the coverage we've given this game so far!) There's a good reason for this: the sequel to Okami is an aesthetically unique Zelda-esque action-adventure game that makes excellent use of the dual-screened handheld's touch screen. Using the stylus, you draw to use the brush techniques that the Celestial Brush Gods have bestowed upon protagonist Chibiterasu. Draw a horizontal line on an enemy, for example, and you'll slash the target; draw a circle and a line on the environment, and you'll make a cherry bomb.

Chibiterasu is not the only one with special abilities, however—he has allies by his side (for the majority of the game, anyway; more on this in a bit) who have their own useful abilities. The young warrior Kuni lends Chibiterasu his swordsmanship in battles, for instance, and the mermaid Nanami can swim to locations the little white wolf can't reach. Unfortunately, Chibiterasu finds himself alone after being nearly drowned by a giant catfish boss and being washed ashore on the Southern Ryoshima Coast. Navigating this area isn't overly problematic, despite the fact Chibi can't read the road signs; by encouraging you to listen to the locals and by blocking you from entering certain areas, the game guides you toward the city of Sei'an.

There Chibiterasu saves a young actress named Kagu from some demons (the city is overrun with them), and the two pair up to get back to the local playhouse. But the demons have set up shop at the theater, locking the front door and renaming the place Purgatory. Kagu knows of a back entrance—though you have to cross a gap to reach it. Fortunately, Kagu can see and walk on Spirit Floors, supernatural bridges invisible to most (Chibiterasu included). To get to the



[Below] Flower power isn't very effective against these demons.

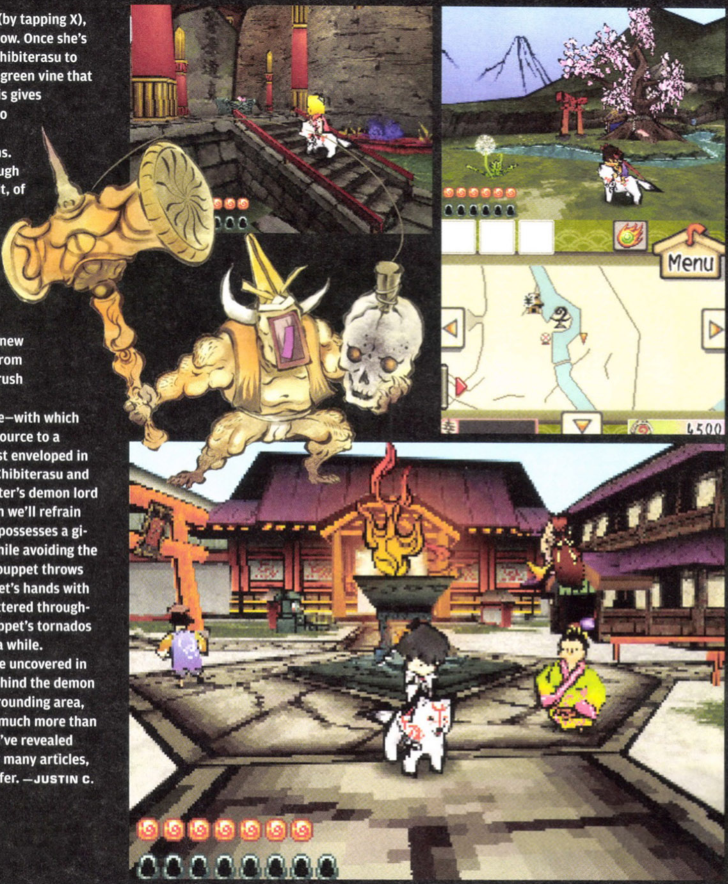


other side, you drop Kagu off (by tapping X), then draw a line for her to follow. Once she's across, you draw a line from Chibiterasu to Kagu, connecting them with a green vine that pulls Chibi over the divide. This gives you a taste of what you need to do to make your way through Purgatory's puzzle-filled rooms. You're not just venturing through the playhouse for the sake of it, of course; you're trying to draw out the big bad demon who fancies himself an acting star. To accomplish this goal, you have to find and exorcise the demons from the stagehands who can prep the main stage. You acquire a new skill along the way—Inferno—from the young phoenix Celestial Brush God, Moegami.

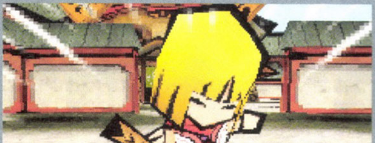
The Inferno brush technique—with which you draw a line from a flame source to a target, such as a treasure chest enveloped in ice—becomes essential when Chibiterasu and Kagu finally confront the theater's demon lord boss (or rather, *bosses*, though we'll refrain from spoiling too much), who possesses a giant wooden kabuki puppet. While avoiding the tornados and giant gears the puppet throws at you, you try to hit the puppet's hands with fire. Thankfully, torches are littered throughout the battlefield, but the puppet's tornados can extinguish the flames for a while.

Naturally, there's more to be uncovered in Okamiden—you learn who's behind the demon invasion of Sei'an and the surrounding area, and you discover that Kagu is much more than just an actress. As much as we've revealed about the game already in our many articles, Okamiden has *a lot* more to offer. —JUSTIN C.

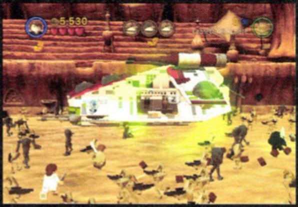
DS
PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM**
RELEASE: **MARCH 2011**



EL DUDERINO


???
Kurow's the name, and having a good time's my game.

A big part of what makes Okamiden different from its predecessor, Okami, is the fact that Chibiterasu has partners. We've talked about Kuni, the son of Okami characters Susano and Kushi, who strives to be as brave as his father; Nanami, the mermaid who holds a grudge against humans after being captured and offered up as a sacrifice to a demon; and Kagu, the self-centered actress who has supernatural abilities. But we encountered another one of Chibi's partners while playing: Kurow, a blonde, flute-playing, scarf-wearing boy who floats instead of walks. This proves to be a very useful skill, as he can cross chasms with ease. However, he seems to be the oddest of the bunch, mostly due to his laid-back attitude. And whereas Kuni, Nanami, and Kagu call Chibiterasu "Mutt," "Squiddy," and "Pooch," respectively, Kurow simply refers to him as "dude."



[Above] Check out how many characters can appear onscreen at once!

LEGO STAR WARS III: THE CLONE WARS

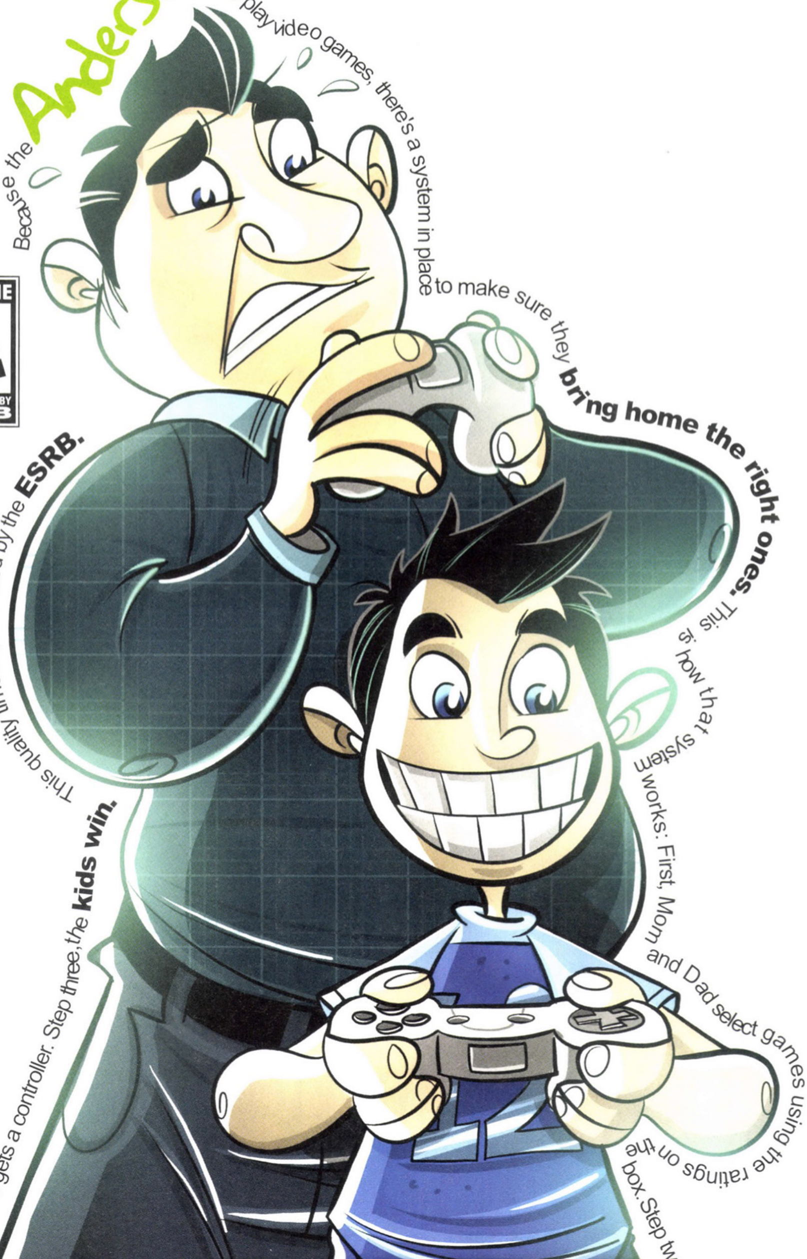
Building a better LEGO Star Wars

ON THE SURFACE, there's not much different about the latest LEGO-ized Star Wars game. You still have the charming graphics and the pick-up-and-play gameplay that you expect from the Traveller's Tales LEGO titles. But LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars adds much more to the usual formula, making this the deepest LEGO adventure we've played so far.

The biggest difference is the addition of Ground Battles, which mix real-time strategy with the traditional LEGO gameplay. The example we were presented with in our demo was a level based on an episode of the *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* TV show, wherein Anakin Skywalker, padawan Ahsoka Tano, and Jedi Master Aayla Secura crash-land on a planet. In the game, you use the Force (by holding Z) to deconstruct your ship, allowing you to create speeder bikes and to reveal the ship's core, which serves as your base. When you approach the core, you see LEGO brick flooring appear, upon which you can build structures such as cannons (very useful when taking down walls made of silver LEGOs, as silver bricks can be destroyed only by explosives). You're not the only one with a base; enemy garrisons are peppered across the battlefield. By demolishing all the structures around the cores, you can assume control over your opponents and call in reinforcements in the form of air support (your allies can drop off vehicles such as AT-RTs). Of course, it helps to have bodies on the ground, too, so you can summon clone troopers by building barracks. You can direct these clones by pointing the reticle at a target, such as gold bricks that can be dismantled by only rapid blaster fire.

The Ground Battles make this title feel more epic than the LEGO games that came before it. But we'll find out if this mode overcomplicates the typically simple-yet-fun franchise when we review LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars next issue. —**JUSTIN C.**

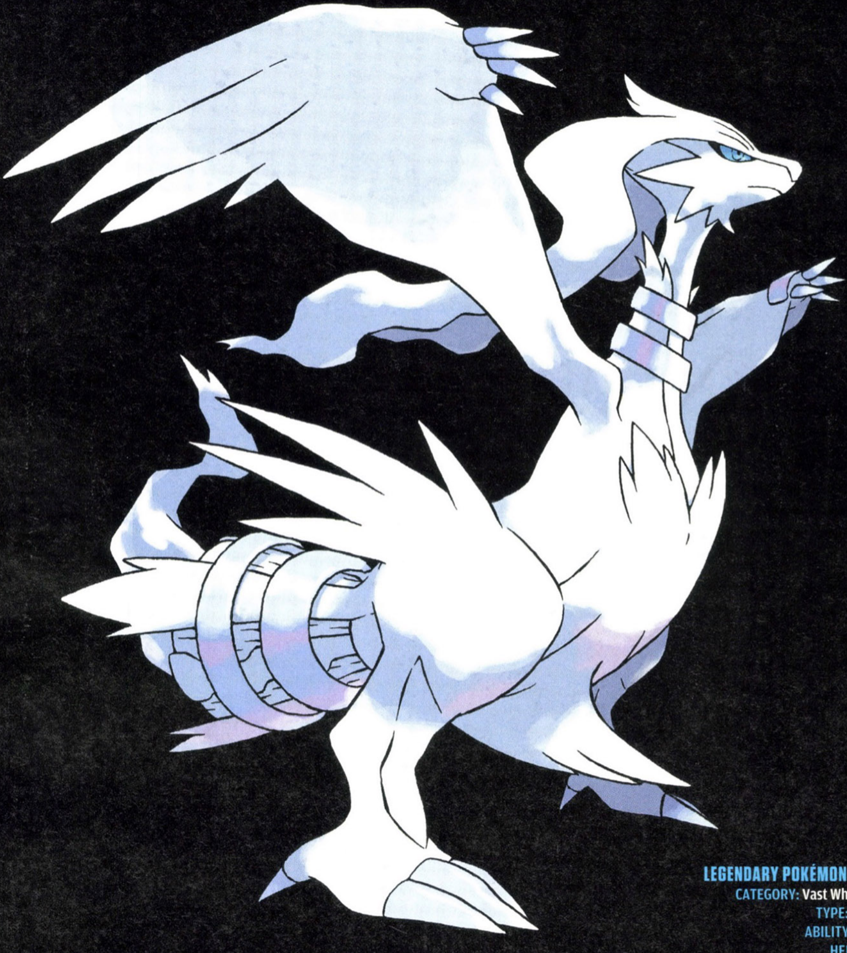
Wii
PUBLISHER: LUCASARTS
DEVELOPER: TRAVELLER'S TALES
RELEASE DATE: FEBRUARY 2011

Because the **Andersons** play video games, there's a system in place to make sure they **bring home the right ones.** This is how that system works: First, Mom and Dad select games using the ratings on the box. Step tw

everyone gets a controller. Step three, the **kids win.** This quality time is presented by the **ESRB.**

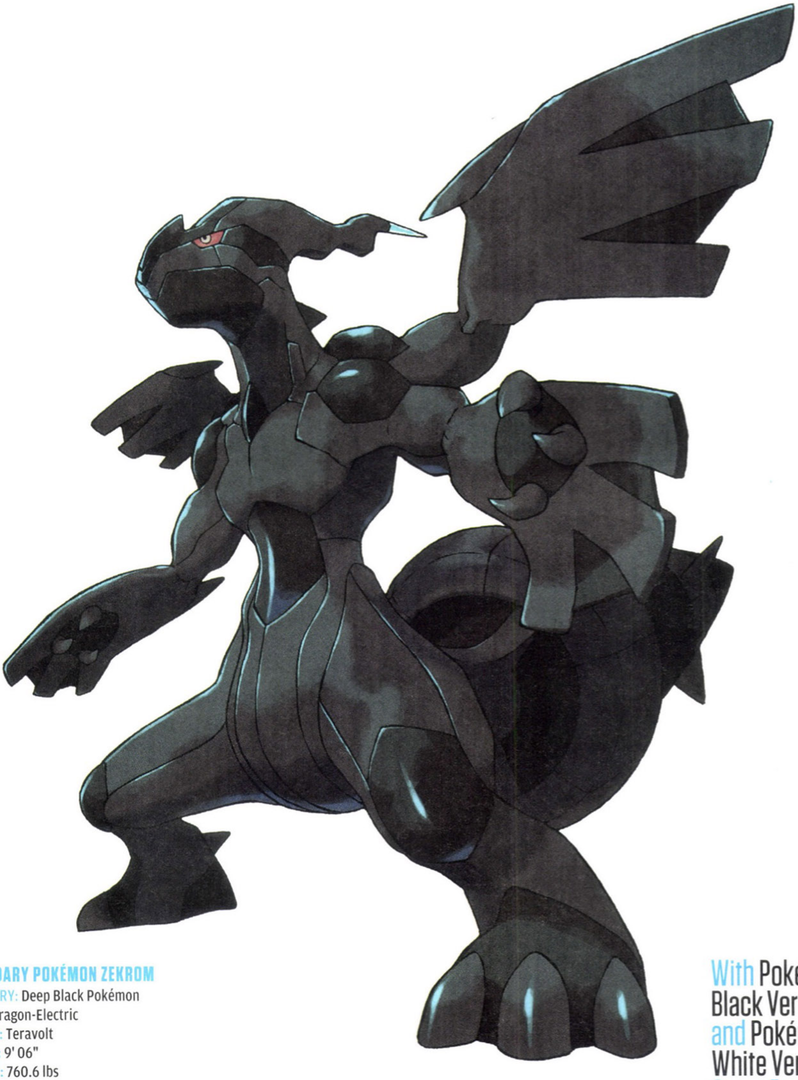
EVERYONE
®
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

© 2006 ESRB. All righ



LEGENDARY POKÉMON RESHIRAM
CATEGORY: Vast White Pokémon
TYPE: Dragon-Fire
ABILITY: Turboblaze
HEIGHT: 10' 06"
WEIGHT: 727.5 lbs.

BACK IN BLACK

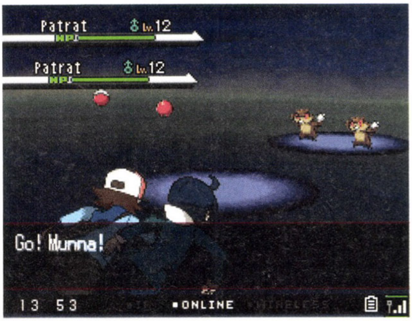


LEGENDARY POKÉMON ZEKROM
CATEGORY: Deep Black Pokémon
TYPE: Dragon-Electric
ABILITY: Teravolt
HEIGHT: 9' 06"
WEIGHT: 760.6 lbs

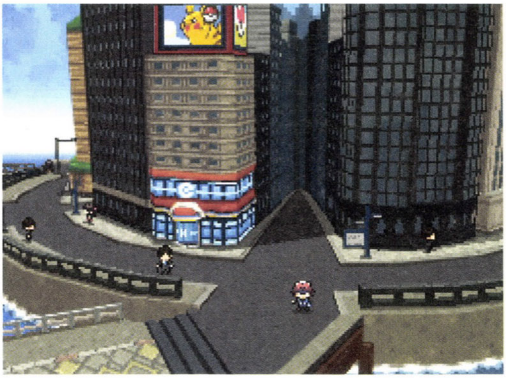
(AND WHITE)

With Pokémon Black Version and Pokémon White Version, Game Freak attempts to craft a compelling new generation of its beloved handheld RPGs.

BY **CASEY LOE** PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** DEVELOPER: **GAME FREAK inc.** RELEASE: **MARCH 2011** **DS**



Go! Munna!

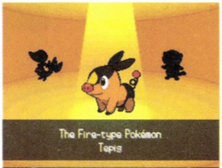


Developer Game Freak brought the Pokémon series to the Nintendo DS system with 2007's Pokémon Diamond and Pearl Versions, taking full advantage of the system's graphical upgrades, touch screen, and advanced connectivity features. And now, for the first time in the franchise's history, they're making a second pair of Pokémon games on the exact same platform. In spite of this—or perhaps because of it—Pokémon Black Version and Pokémon White Version stand as the series's most innovative and ambitious releases in over a decade. Even without the benefit of new hardware, Game Freak has performed a massive graphical overhaul, found significant new ways to bring players together, and made a number of surprising revisions to the Pokémon formula. The two new games prove that you don't need a new hardware generation to make a major generational leap.

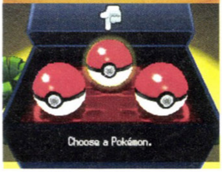
NEW LOOK

Pokémon Diamond and Pearl Versions brought polygonal environments to the series for the first time, but kept the camera positioned firmly overhead. These latest releases unlock the camera to great effect, adding a sense of depth to the world by tilting down to a street view when you walk between skyscrapers, or panning to reveal a panoramic view of a distant area when you climb to the top of a hill.

While more-ambitious camerawork and a richer variety of settings have made the game's settings look a bit better, the battle system has received the most striking overhaul. After 15 years of watching cardboard cutouts jiggle to attack each other, Pokémon have suddenly sprung to life during combat, with flapping wings, wagging tails, nodding heads, and blinking eyes. The amount of work that went into the animation must have been staggering, especially considering the artists needed to create different animation cycles from both the front and back for every single Pokémon in the game. Having full-body animated versions of each Pokémon has allowed Game Freak to add in some camerawork and create significantly more-exciting combat scenes by zooming in and out of Pokémon as they perform their moves and enter and leave the battlefield. This is the biggest graphical advance we've seen between two generations of Pokémon titles.



The Fire-type Pokémon
Tepig



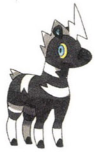
Choose a Pokémon.

NEW POKÉMON

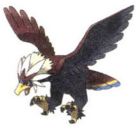
One naturally expects to find a new batch of Pokémon in each game generation, and the new games introduce more than 150 of the creatures—more than any previous game in the series. That's more than enough new Pokémon to fill every role in the story, so for the first time since the franchise's debut, the developers have been

POKÉMON PROFILES

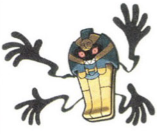
Here are just a few of the over 150 new Pokémon you can look forward to meeting in the Unova Region.



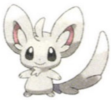
BLITZLE
TYPE: Electric



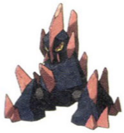
BRAVIARY
TYPE: Normal/Flying



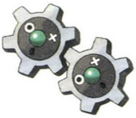
COFAGRIGUS
TYPE: Ghost



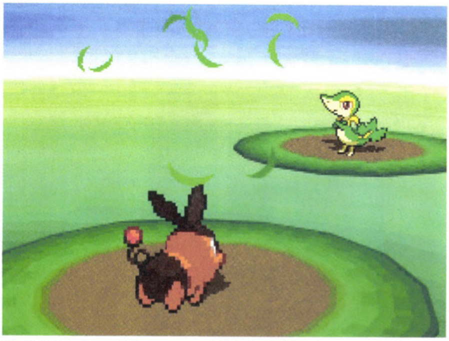
MINCCINO
TYPE: Normal



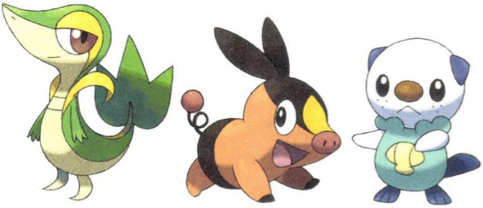
GIGALITH
TYPE: Rock



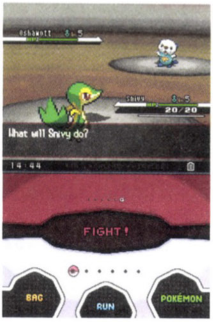
KLINK
TYPE: Steel



[Above] With all-new Pokémon instead of the old standbys, early battles are extra exciting. Even Pokémon pros will have a lot to learn!



The three new Starter Pokémon are Snivy (a Grass-Type Pokémon), Tepig (a Fire-Type Pokémon), and Oshawott (a Water-Type Pokémon).



What will Snivy do?

able to cut the 493 previously existing Pokémon out of the main quest entirely. Don't worry—all your favorites are still in the game, but none of the classic Pokémon can be caught or traded until after the ending credits have rolled.

For the first time since Pokémon Red and Blue Versions, players will be starting completely from scratch without any foreknowledge of the Pokémon they'll encounter. That means having to experiment with new Pokémon instead of relying on old standbys, and being surprised by what awaits in each new area or enemy Trainer's roster. It also means not having to deal with some of the overexposed members of the Pokémon cast; it's a lot more exciting to explore that first cave when you know you won't have to sift through the usual Zubat and Geodude iterations, and it's great to battle young Trainers and have to actually think about your combat strategy instead of going on autopilot when you see that first Weedle or Rattata.

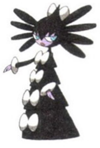
Don't get me wrong, Machop. I cherish the time that I spent with you in pretty much every Pokémon game ever made. It just feels good to experiment with other Fighting-type Pokémon once in a while. We can still be friends, though, right? I'll load you up on Pokémon SoulSilver Version someday!

NEW WORLD

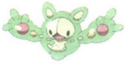
The reason for the new cast in Pokémon Black Version and Pokémon White Version is the game's distant setting, which is far from where every previous Pokémon title has taken place. Vastly different from the now-iconic Regions of Kanto, Johto, Hoenn, and Sinnoh, the latest pair of Pokémon adventures has taken the series overseas to the brand-new land of Unova, which is a stretch of urban sprawl.

It's as drastic a change in scenery as the series has ever seen; rural fields, windmill farms, and resort towns have given way to skyscraper-lined streets, hipster artist communities, and lavish theme parks. Even the gyms have an urban flavor, with the Trainers serving as the waitstaff of a fancy restaurant or setting up shop in the back of a public museum.

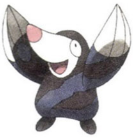
Unova also hosts some untouched natural reserves,



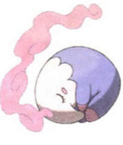
GOTHITELLE
TYPE: Psychic



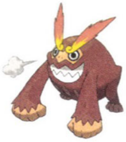
REUNICLUS
TYPE: Psychic



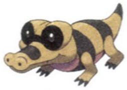
DRILBUR
TYPE: Ground



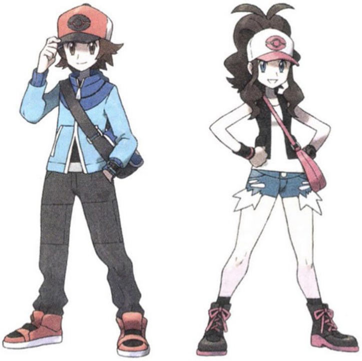
MUSHARNA
TYPE: Psychic



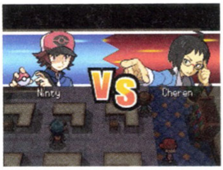
DARMANITAN
TYPE: Fire

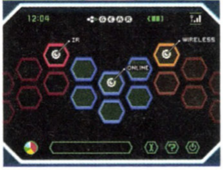


SANDILE
TYPE: Ground/Dark



"Are you a boy? Or a girl?" That question has kicked off every Pokémon RPG. Here are the Trainers you'll be picking from in this adventure.





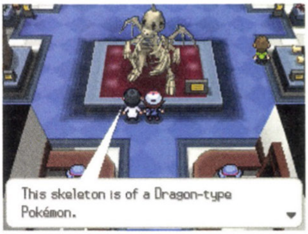
including a dense forest, a swampy wetland, and even an arid desert located only a few steps outside of a metropolis. The clash between city and nature is one of the main themes of the game, and it's a key point in the division between the two titles: Pokémon Black Version hosts Black City, an overbuilt strip of shadowy skyscrapers, where Pokémon White Version instead features White Forest, a lush patch of pristine old-growth woodlands. Now when deciding what version to buy, you'll have to look beyond which Pokémon you want to catch.

NEW FRIENDS AND ENEMIES

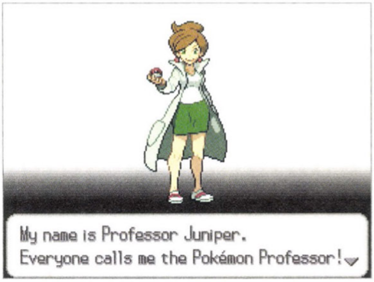
Although each Pokémon generation has offered a new cast of heroes and villains, they've always been slotted into the same rigid roles. In every game you'll find a kindly professor, a hometown rival who needs to be taught to respect his Pokémon, and a bumbling pair of villains who have somehow managed to build an organized-crime empire based solely on the exploitation of Pokémon.

Pokémon Black Version and Pokémon White Version finally break this rigid formula by introducing a new cast with roles that, ironically, aren't so black and white. In place of a rival, you have actual friends; Cheren and Bianca may want to throw down from time to time, but they're always willing to help you on your quest and even fight beside you in double battles. Professor Juniper is—gasp—a woman. Even "N"—the mysterious young man who's always popping out of doorways and around corners to challenge you to Pokémon duels—seems like a nice enough guy—his role goes deeper than just being a thorn in your side.

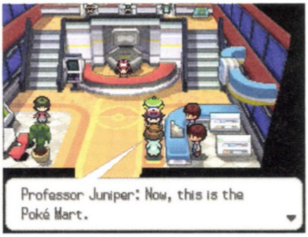
The villains of Unova are a group of political activists preaching the cause of Pokémon Liberation.



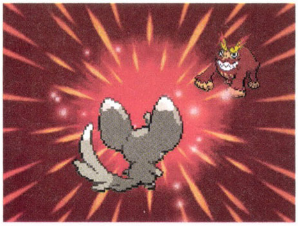
This skeleton is of a Dragon-type Pokémon.

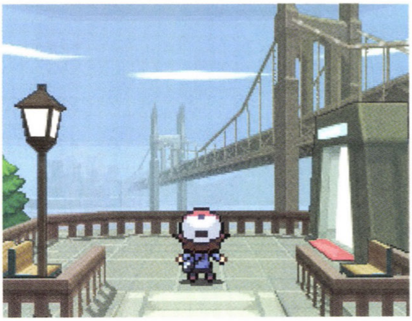


My name is Professor Juniper.
Everyone calls me the Pokémon Professor!

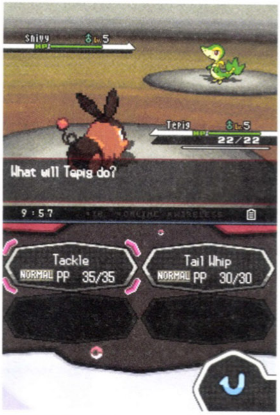


Professor Juniper: Now, this is the Poké Mart.

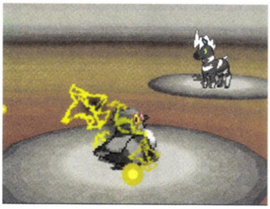




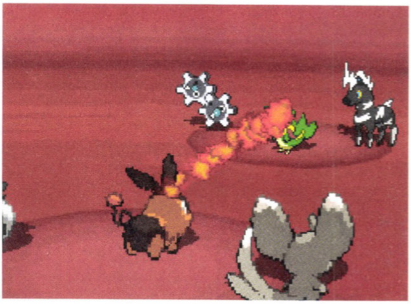
The new Unova Region boasts graphics that go beyond anything the series has achieved so far. From interior and exterior locations to the Pokémon battle screen, everything looks great.



What will Tepig do?



[Below] For the first time, you can participate in three-on-three Triple Battles!



They don't exactly practice what they preach, but it's nice to see villains stand for something more than moustache-twirling evil. The rank-and-file members of the organization are your typical hapless goofballs, but the group's leader is a legitimately scary guy with a silver tongue, a hidden agenda, and what appear to be supernatural powers. For the first time in a Pokémon sequel, it isn't at all clear how the story will unfold.

NEW WAYS TO BATTLE

There are a lot of great new features in store for competitive Pokémon players, with a number of new battle formats that offer more strategic potential than the traditional one-at-a-time duels. One of the coolest new formats is the Triple Battle, which allows Pokémon to square off in three-on-three fights. To curb the obvious strategy of ganging up on the weakest of your opponent's Pokémon, this mode allows only the center Pokémon to select any target, while preventing the side Pokémon from attacking across the battlefield. (So, for example, your left Pokémon can target your opponent's left or center Pokémon, but not the one to the right.) This mode allows players to arrange their rosters like a traditional RPG party, with healers and defenders playing a much more viable role in combat than they ever have before. The Triple Battle is only one of a trio of advanced combat types with unique rules.

Needless to say, the game's large cast of new Pokémon should shake up the competitive battling scene. There are Pokémon that possess new, strategically significant combinations of types, and a mode that allows players to recruit classic Pokémon with abilities that they'd never had access to before. And frequent battlers will appreciate the many battle-system refinements that allow the fights to play out more quickly, with less time wasted on lengthy attack animations and watching life bars slowly tick down lost HP.

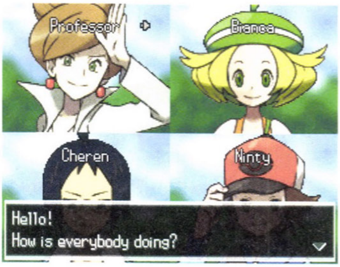
NEW WAYS TO CONNECT

Among the most welcome refinements is the variety of new ways players can interact with each other. Instead of having to visit Pokémon Centers for all of their connectivity needs, players can now use a new device known as the C-Gear. It appears on the bottom screen, allowing for IR communications whenever and wherever, and maintaining an active Local Wireless connection that scans for nearby players and keep tabs on your friends. The C-Gear will even let you enter other players' worlds; for example, a player of Pokémon Black Version could link up with a friend's copy of the game to visit the exclusive White Forest area in Pokémon White Version.

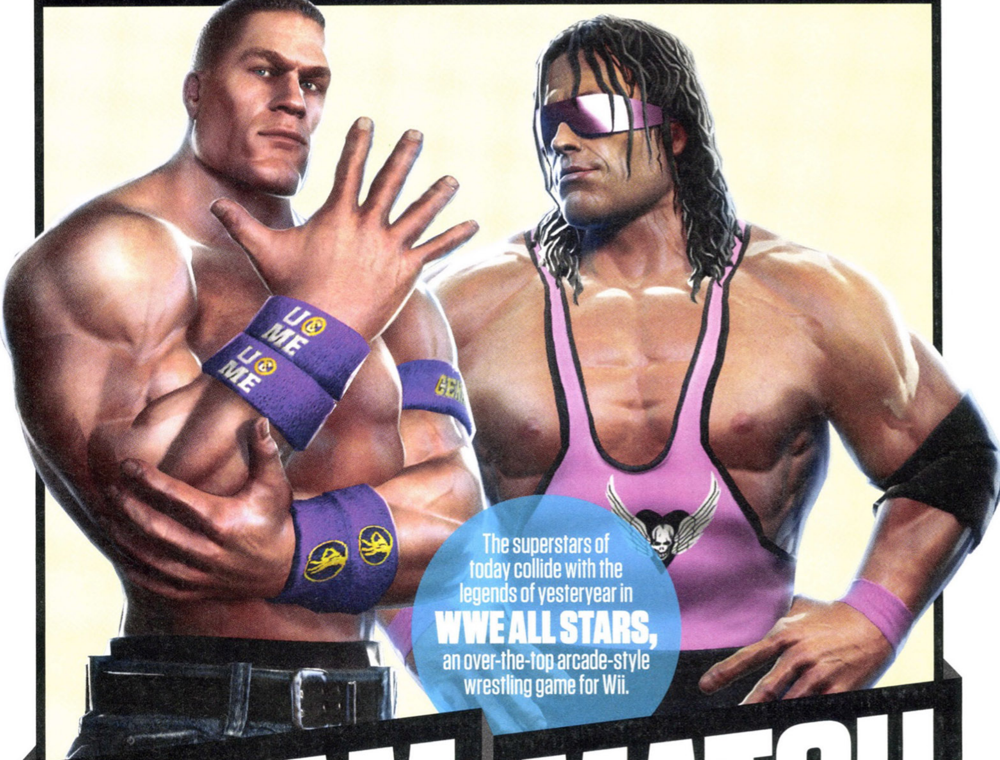
You'll also acquire an Xtransceiver on your travels, which is a four-way video phone that allows you to correspond directly with your friends, be they in-game characters or actual human beings. (Players will need to use a Nintendo DSi or Nintendo DSi XL handheld to engage in video chat.) But for the first time, the Global Terminal features a new Random Matchup mode that will pit them against other players located anywhere in the world—there's no longer a need to find an available friend to battle online.

That's only scratching the surface of the new connectivity features in this generation of Pokémon games. Pokémon Diamond and Pearl Versions brought the series online for the first time with the Pokémon Global Trade Station, and its more full-featured replacement is set to launch alongside the new games, with a host of exciting new features that we'll be covering next month.

Fennel: Game Sync is fascinating, I think.
Do you think so, too?



Hello!
How is everybody doing?



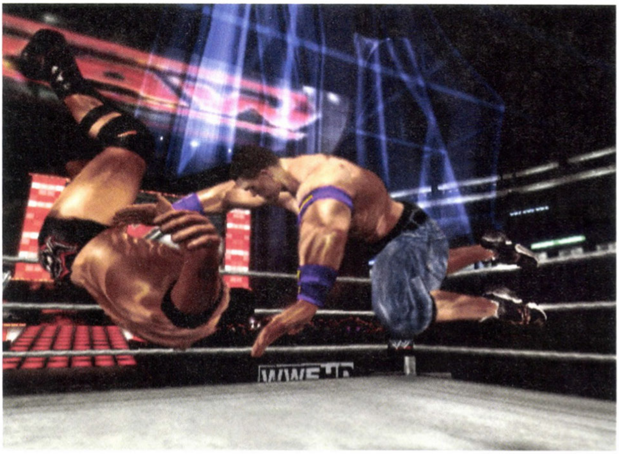
The superstars of today collide with the legends of yesteryear in **WWE ALL STARS,** an over-the-top arcade-style wrestling game for Wii.

DREAM MATCH

You've never seen a wrestling game quite like WWE All Stars. In fact, it might not even be fair to call it a wrestling game. Part wrestling, part fighting, and part nostalgia trip, the title encompasses everything that fans have come to love about WWE over the last few decades while bringing it up to modern-day spec with intense action, stylized visuals, and exaggerated special moves that will knock players out of their proverbial boots. To put it another way: this ain't your father's WWE, but chances are, he'll want to play, too.

BY **CHRIS HOFFMAN**

PUBLISHER: **THQ** DEVELOPER: **THQ SAN DIEGO** RELEASE: **MARCH 2011** **Wii**

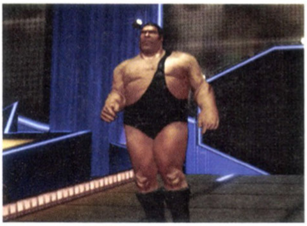


One of the game's biggest hooks is its deep roster, which features more than 25 characters, split between today's top WWE talents (such as John Cena and Rey Mysterio) and the stars of the '80s and '90s (including Bret "The Hitman" Hart, Andre the Giant, and The Rock). In real life you'd never get to see The Rock fight John Cena, or witness Rey Mysterio tag-team with Andre, but All Stars will give you a chance to see how such fantasy matchups would play out.

"We wanted to create a new experience for the fans," explains Sal DiVita, the game's creative director. "There's so much great talent today, as there was in the past. We felt it would be impactful to combine the generations and put them in a world where they could compete against one another with the types of exaggerated abilities we created for them in WWE All Stars."

At press time, THQ had revealed only the five aforementioned characters, but fans can rest assured that the biggest names in the business will be included, brother. "It was very difficult coming up with the roster, as everyone has their favorite WWE legends and WWE superstars," DiVita comments. "However, through a very collaborative process between THQ and WWE, we made our difficult decisions and came up with an even legends-to-superstars ratio. I personally think we have an amazing lineup for WWE All Stars, and I know a few of the talent we managed to acquire on our roster will be pleasantly and shockingly surprising to our players. I'm still shocked myself!"

[Below] The bigger they are, the harder they fall. The problem, of course, is that guys like Andre the Giant don't fall too often.

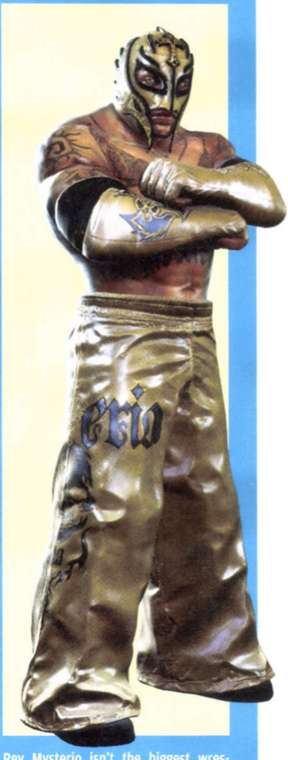


Just don't expect the characters to look exactly like you remember them. WWE performers are known for being larger than life, and that's being taken to the max in All Stars—you'll see small heads, large hands, and superhuman physiques. To quote wrestling manager Bobby "The Brain" Heenan, "These guys have muscles in places where most people don't even have places!"

"The stylized look of the characters serves multiple purposes," states DiVita. "We wanted the WWE legends and WWE superstars to be part of a world where they looked like they could perform the types of amplified moves we have them performing in the game but without exuding a cartoon-inspired look and feel. Our talented art team created a character art style that exudes power and is even beastly at times, while having an authentic and realistic look as well. In a way, it's almost like having the superhero versions of the corresponding WWE talent. These guys definitely look like they could cause

★ REY MYSTERIO ★

CHARACTER CLASS: ACROBAT



Rey Mysterio isn't the biggest wrestler out there, but he's one of the most talented and popular. The masked Mysterio grew up learning the *lucha libre* style of Mexican wrestling from his uncle, and he's been using that style to impress audiences since he entered the ring at the age of 14. One of his favorite moves is the 619, named after the area code of his home town of San Diego.

some damage to one another."

The audio aspects of the presentation, however, are remaining completely authentic. Legendary announcer "The Fink" Howard Finkel will introduce the characters as they head to the ring, while WWE Hall of Famers Jim Ross and Jerry "The King" Lawler will handle commentary duties.

★ JOHN CENA ★

CHARACTER CLASS: BRAWLER

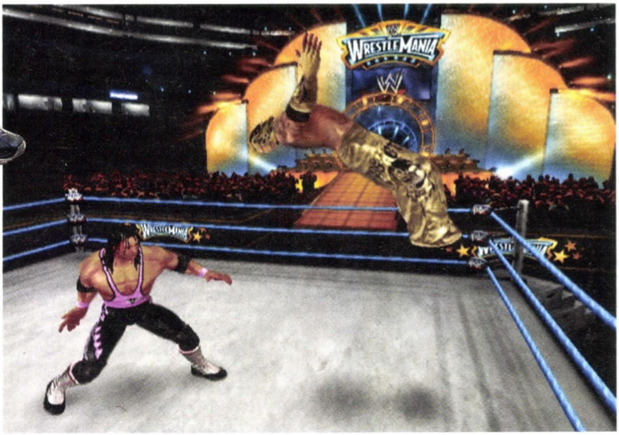
A multitime WWE champion, John Cena is arguably the biggest star in WWE today. When he isn't using his incredible strength to win matches with his Attitude Adjustment finishing move, he's starring in movies and TV shows. Cena once cut a promo where he compared his WWE opponents to characters from Nintendo's Punch-Out!!

TIME TO PLAY THE GAME

But an electrifying presentation and a diverse character roster aren't all that WWE All Stars has going for it. It's also got a lot of innovations where it matters most—in the gameplay department. The action isn't just about suplexes, dropkicks, and headlocks; it's about knocking opponents into the air and juggling them with combos, stringing together sequences of throws with timed button presses, and unleashing special moves that shake the entire arena. In addition to the perennial grappling favorite WWF No Mercy, the dev team has cited games such as Saturday Night Slam Masters, Def Jam: Fight for New York, and even Street Fighter IV as influences and inspirations. Like those titles, WWE All Stars is all about frantic arcade-style action and pick-up-and-play accessibility.

"As a complement to THQ's simulation-style experience with the renowned WWE SmackDown vs. Raw franchise, we wanted to find a way of extending the WWE brand of gaming in a completely different way," notes DiVita. "The idea of a stylized gameplay experience came up and seemed like a perfect fit for us at the THQ San Diego studio. As a development team, our combined background is experienced and focused in creating responsive, fast-paced, hard-hitting, and entertaining combat gameplay. My game-making background goes back to the stand-up arcade days on games like NBA Jam, WWF WrestleMania: The Arcade Game,

[Below] Expect lots of high-flying offense from Acrobat-class characters such as Rey Mysterio.



Straight from the Hart

There are few WWE competitors with as storied a history as Bret "The Hitman" Hart. A five-time former WWE champion who has been involved in some of the most talked-about events in wrestling history, "The Excellence of Execution" is one of the true icons of the business. We recently spoke to The Hitman about his role in WWE video games.

NINTENDO POWER **You've been involved with wrestling video games one way or another for a long time. What's it like now compared to what you were doing years ago with the older WWE games?**

BRET HART Well, you know, even back a long time ago, they were the leaders at the time. All the old video games from years back were always pretty well done. They're always raising the bar, and that's a good thing.

At one time they were actually filming you and digitizing you to put you into the games, right? What was that like?

Yeah. That was pretty painful, actually! A lot more than people realize, especially for me back then. I had to drop elbows on a padded floor, but there was a board underneath; it wasn't really that padded. I really did spend a whole day doing that. I think I took more bumps and falls than I did in a month's worth of wrestling!

Are you pleased with how they've captured you for the most recent games?

Yeah, I think so. They sort of incorporate a lot of your real-life wrestling moves and stuff that you do. They really study your character before they put it on the video game.

If you could use the video game to have a rematch of one of your favorite matches, what would you pick?

First two that come to mind: probably the [British] Bulldog match at Wembley Stadium would be fun to do over on a video game, and at the same time the Iron Man match [against Shawn Michaels at WrestleMania XII] stands out. But Steve Austin would be a good one also. In a video game, that would be fun for me to play again.

For the Iron Man match and the Bulldog match, would the outcome be different the second time?

Who's to say? The wrestling fan in me always kind of liked it the way it ended. I liked the drama of my career. The matches I won and the matches I lost—part of the beauty was how I lost those matches. So maybe I'd want to try to create a more dramatic way to lose! That would be nice to try to do.

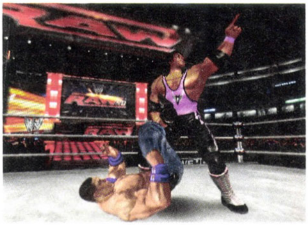
Why should players pick your character?

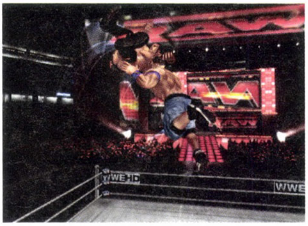
I've always been told that the guys that make the games are the biggest fans of them all, and I've met lots of them that said that my character *is* The Excellence of Execution, and he can beat just about everybody. I think that says it all for me. I have a lot of respect for the guys that put the games together, and I think that over the years, especially when I wasn't working with WWE or Vince McMahon, they really did keep my character and my image alive on the video games, and sort of represented me well, and I always appreciate that.

★ BRET "THE HITMAN" HART ★

CHARACTER CLASS: GRAPPLER

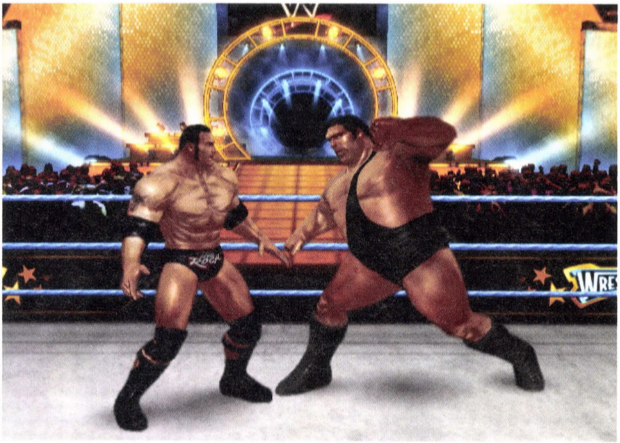
Hailing from a family of professional wrestlers, Bret Hart has pretty much done it all. Proclaiming himself "the best there is, the best there was, and the best there ever will be," Bret held virtually every championship available during his WWE tenure. He's known for defeating opponents with his Sharpshooter submission hold.

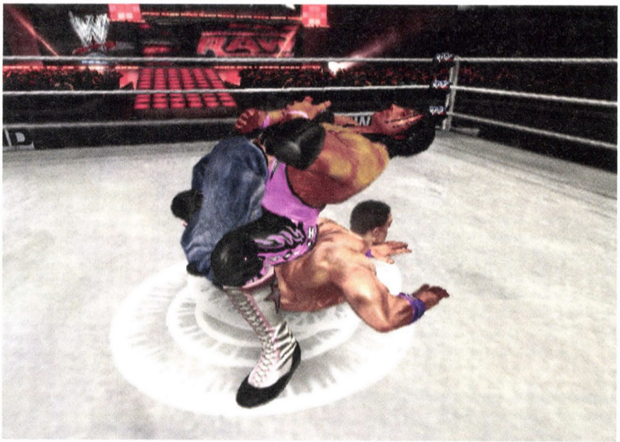




NFL Blitz, MLB Slugfest, and more. We made our first prototype with the idea of a stylized, fast-paced, easily accessible (yet strategically deep), and combat-driven WWE game. We put the prototype in front of various game enthusiasts and the WWE Universe to read their reactions, and—wow! The result was beyond our expectations."

Each character's main arsenal consists of strong strikes, quick strikes, strong grapples, and quick grapples. (THQ is still finalizing the control scheme, but the game will be compatible with the Classic Controller.) As you'd expect from a wrestling game, you can execute various slams, suplexes, holds, and throws, depending on the button you press after you initiate a grapple. Additionally, you can shift to alternate grapple states (from a front-facing grapple to a headlock, for example) to utilize a wider range of moves. If mat-based technique isn't getting the job done, you can always use punches and kicks, or jump from the turnbuckle for an aerial attack. Defense isn't being ignored, either; you can block and reverse attacks using different buttons depending on whether you're countering grapples or strikes. You can even counter some reversals, which promises to provide a





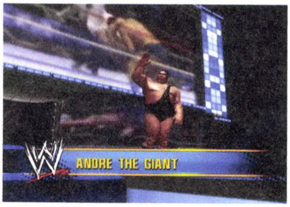
★ ANDRE THE GIANT ★

CHARACTER CLASS: BIG MAN

Often called "The Eighth Wonder of the World" and the biggest draw in the history of pro wrestling, Andre the Giant was known for his incredible power and size. Despite becoming a household name, he held the WWE Championship only once—very briefly in 1988. Andre is also widely recognized for his role in the film *The Princess Bride*.

satisfying chain-wrestling feel.

If you think all that sounds pretty much like the wrestling-game norm, you're right, but that action doesn't stop there. Certain moves have extra effects on your opponent—you can hit him so hard, for example, that he'll fly into and rebound right off of the ring ropes, or he'll hit the mat with such force that he'll bounce into the air. This is where the game's combo opportunities come into play—you can juggle opponents with repeated strikes, or grab them out of the sky with a well-timed slam.

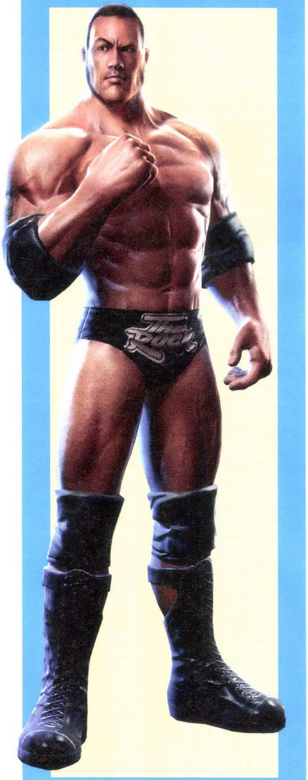


The action only gets wilder from there. As you battle your adversary, you'll build up an energy meter, which allows you to activate your character's Extreme Signature moves. Each character has four of these maneuvers (two from the standing position and two that are triggered from other positions), which are souped-up versions of the performers' most famous moves. When The Rock performs his trademark People's Elbow, for instance, he'll run back and forth across the ring like usual, but instead of simply elbow-dropping his opponent, he'll leap high into the air and spin around before he comes crashing down on his unfortunate foe.

"With WWE All Stars, we were given a great opportunity to take creative liberties when designing and developing our moves," DiVita elaborates. "Think of our moves as amplified versions of what the WWE talent can do as part of their respective repertoires. We've definitely spiced up the signature moves...for a visually awesome spectacle. As an example, when WWE superstar John Cena performs his Five-Knuckle Shuffle in WWE All Stars, he performs his setup very similar to how he performs it in WWE programming. However, before he drops down to hit his opponent, he'll get quite a few feet of air, and we've thrown in a barrel roll for some additional flair."

★ THE ROCK ★

CHARACTER CLASS: BRAWLER



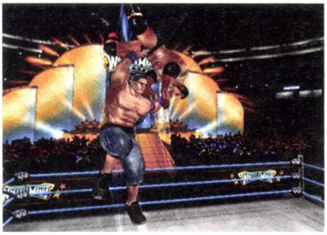
When he first appeared on the scene as Rocky Maivia, no one imagined that The Rock would become one of the most popular and successful WWE superstars of all time. After capturing audiences' imaginations with his charisma, athleticism, showmanship, and—of course—The People's Eyebrow, The Rock has gone on to become a bona fide Hollywood star.

Like on WWE programming, characters also have their own unique finishing moves. These devastating meter-dependent moves are usually enough to send your opponent's health meter into the "critical" zone, after which he'll be ripe for a pinfall—or you could simply go for a knockout by executing a finisher when your adversary's health is thoroughly empty. Unlike in traditional wrestling matches, pinfalls or KOs can occur anywhere—even outside the ring—and there are no submission victories (although you can perform submission moves to drain an opponent's health).

On the other hand, if you're a rule-breaker who can't resist grabbing a foreign object (such as a steel chair) from under the ring, you could end up losing by disqualification. You'll get a warning for your first two weapon attacks, but after that there's a chance you'll get caught and be forced to leave the ring in shame.

A CLASS OF THEIR OWN

To add further depth to the action, each WWE superstar or legend belongs to one of four character classes, each with its own distinct abilities and advantages. Technique-oriented Grapplers (such as Bret Hart) boast superior grappling moves that are hard to defend against, plus they have chain-grapple combos that allow you to smoothly transition from one move to the next; they can also perform extra-powerful charged grapples (done by holding away from your opponent and holding down the strong grapple button) and can pin opponents from a variety of situations. Acrobats (such as Rey Mysterio) are high fliers; they're faster than the rest and can perform quick diving moves and springboard attacks off the ropes. In one of the most impressive displays in the game, Acrobats can even flip off of opponents and land on the top turnbuckle, in perfect position for an aerial assault. The Brawler class (which includes characters such as The Rock and John Cena) is perhaps the most well-rounded. In the same way that Grapplers can perform charged grapples, Brawlers can utilize unblockable charged strikes. Brawlers also excel at melee-based combos. Last but not least are the Big Men (such as Andre the Giant). As you might expect, these guys are all about power. Not only can they perform charged strikes, but they can store the charge effect for later use. They also boast superior defense; they're hard to knock down, plus they'll shove opponents back when blocking attacks. On the other hand, they're fairly slow and in most cases can't leap from the top rope.



[Left] Some people think John Cena believes that he's Superman. Appropriately, in All Stars you'll get to see him practically fly!

WrestleMania

[Below] If that punch lands, it'll give a new meaning to the nickname "Hitman."

"If you put me on the spot and made me choose, I'd probably say I like the Acrobat class the most, but by a very narrow margin," DiVita admits. "That's not saying the Acrobat class is overpowered by any means, as every class and every character has its own pros and cons, but I love playing them all. The reason I'd choose the Acrobat is because I am a fan of agile and high-flying moves. In our game, an Acrobat is fast and hard to follow, because one second he can be barraging his opponent with a flurry of quick, striking attacks. In the next moment, he'll be launching off the opponent, the ropes, or the turnbuckles directly to an aerial attack combination. He moves quick around the arena and bounces and springs off of everything. I like how it can throw off opponents."

And the character classes are only one component of the game's diversity. Although THQ isn't divulging many details yet, the game will feature numerous match types and game modes, along with substantial character-creation tools and simultaneous action for up to four players. With so many gameplay options and a character roster than spans generations, WWE All Stars has the potential to capture the attention of wrestling fans and nonfans alike.

"You don't have to be a WWE or wrestling enthusiast to take interest in WWE All Stars," asserts DiVita, "because it's not just about the sport or the incredible talent. WWE All Stars has all the right elements to be enjoyed by anyone who can appreciate fresh and entertaining gameplay that has fast action, is easily approachable yet strategically diverse, and delivers a hard-hitting, combat-oriented experience."

We'll get to see if those words ring true when WWE All Stars arrives this March.

Here Is Your Winner...

For years, the voice of Howard Finkel—affectionately known as The Fink—has been synonymous with WWE. The longest-tenured employee in the company, The Fink has announced the participants and victors of countless matches, and he's authoritatively established the reign of many a new champion. Appropriately, he's also the ring announcer for WWE All Stars. We had an opportunity to chat with The Fink about his career, his role in the game, and WWE's robust history.

NINTENDO POWER **How does it feel to be chosen as, essentially, the voice of WWE All Stars?**

HOWARD FINKEL When I got the word that I was selected to be the voice of this game, I was honored and flattered for the opportunity. I knew it would be a tremendous undertaking, but I went into that session with the mindset as if I were ring-announcing at a sold-out arena of WWE Universe fans, and that meant to me to give it everything I had—to make the game even better than it already was projected to be.

What do you find appealing about the game's legends vs. superstars concept?

It's like a dream come true for a wrestling fan. There have always been comparisons about how a superstar of the past would fare against a current superstar. Now you will have the opportunity to make those two worlds collide with WWE All Stars.

What was it like to be introducing these legends again (especially given that some of them are no longer with us) or introducing newer stars who perhaps you haven't introduced in an actual televised match?

For me, it was kind of surreal to a point with the legends. When I did the voiceover sessions and I would announce one of the legends' names, I would think of some of the great matches they had, which involved my participation as the ring announcer. With the current superstars: I have had the pleasure of announcing many of them through my work at WWE live events, and those who were selected just enhanced my belief that the possibilities are endless with the legends and the superstars in this game.

Of course, this isn't the first time you've been in a game. Your voice and likeness appeared in World Wrestling Federation Rage in the Cage in 1993, and there may have been others before that. How has the experience of participating in video games changed and improved for you over the years?

I've had an absolute blast being a part of the WWE video games through the years. And through each passing game I have developed even more of an appreciation for the effort that's put forth in their development. Technologically speaking, every succeeding video game has blown me away in a positive vein, and today it's far advanced from what it used to be. Looking back at 1993 and then looking to 2011 and what we can look forward to in the upcoming WWE All Stars game, it's a great statement that's being

WRESTLEMANIA
JOHN CENA

made by WWE and THQ, as they give the fans the very optimum in WWE video games.

How did you get your start as a ring announcer?
I worked as an usher at the New Haven (CT) Coliseum in the 1970s. I was a big fan of wrestling and I asked the building manager to bring wrestling into the Coliseum. Back then, there was no wrestling in the market because there was no local TV to promote a live event. However, there was a UHF TV station broadcasting wrestling from Long Island, and its signal came into the New Haven area as clear as a bell. The Coliseum GM spoke to Vince McMahon and told him that he had an usher (me) who said that the then-WWWF was able to be seen in the New Haven area. One thing led to another, the WWWF returned to New Haven in 1975, and Vince and I were introduced and I kept in touch with him at that time. I mentioned to him that I had some broadcasting experience and he offered me the opportunity to try my hand at ring announcing. I did my very first live event during the summer of 1976 in Worcester, MA, in addition to ring announcing right back in New Haven! Things went so well for me that I was then given the chance to make my ring-announcing debut at Madison Square Garden on January 17, 1977. To ring-announce in the "World's Most Famous Arena" is one of my cherished moments in my career.

How is announcing for the game different from announcing live?
It really isn't. The only thing you're missing are the fans. When I did the ring-announcing lines for All Stars, I couldn't go in there with the mindset that I was announcing in an audio booth; I had to go in with the mindset that I was announcing in the ring in a sold-out arena full of excited WWE fans! No shortcuts allowed whatsoever; I gave it my all! The emotion, inflection, and passion absolutely came through, as I had to produce with my voice as if it were the real deal.

How did it feel to be a part of Old School Raw last November and re-experience those classic aspects of WWE?
To be a part of Old School Raw was quite an experience for all of us involved. I got to see acquaintances I hadn't seen—some of them in several years. I still occasionally ring-announce at WWE live events, but that evening in Hershey, PA meant a lot to me. I believe that Old School Raw should not be a "one-and-done," but should be incorporated as an annual event; it was that good!

Why do you think the Federation years of the 1980s and '90s still resonate with so many fans?
My thinking is along the lines that each era within WWE through the 1980s and 1990s was unique in its own way: From the Rock 'n' Wrestling Connection in the 1980s to the Attitude Era in the late 1990s, there was always a period of different superstars and different stories to be told, and every time something changed it was embraced by the WWE Universe. For that reason alone, there is always going to be a memory or two that all of our fans will remember. That's why I think the 1980s and 1990s will always remain engrained as a part of the WWE's culture.

[Above] The Rock's entrance wouldn't be complete without The Fink announcing his arrival.

If someone is relatively new to WWE, what five classic WWE matches (from 2000 or prior) would you recommend they watch on DVD or tape to get into an appropriate old-school mood?
In no particular order:
WrestleMania III (1987): Intercontinental Championship Match—Ricky "The Dragon" Steamboat vs. "Macho "Man" Randy Savage;
WrestleMania X (1994): Ladder Match for the Intercontinental Championship—Shawn Michaels vs. Razor Ramon;
Summer Slam 1991: Intercontinental Championship Match—Mr. Perfect vs. Bret Hart;
1981 Alley Fight, Madison Square Garden—Pat Patterson vs. Sgt. Slaughter;
1983 Steel Cage Match, Madison Square Garden—Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka vs. The Magnificent Muraco.

Of the Gobbledy Gooker, Max Moon, the Shockmaster, Xanta Klaus, Isaac Yankem, and Mantaur, which one would you most like to see included in the game?
Isaac Yankem—because it would fill a "huge cavity" in the game!

Would you like to see the developers include a tuxedo match in the game?
I don't think so. To quote WWE Hall of Famer the legendary Gorilla Monsoon, it would be because it was "due to a diminishing number of requests."

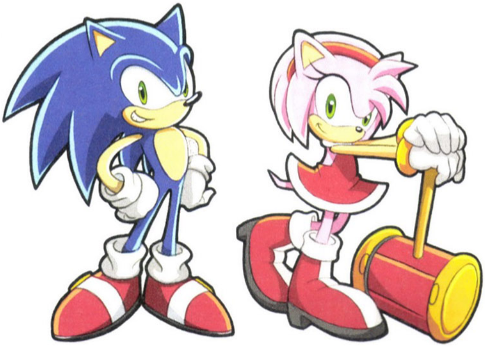
What's the one thing you most thought you'd never have to say (but you've said) as a ring announcer?
The one thing that I never thought I'd say was announcing Bret Hart and Lex Luger as co-winners of the 1994 Royal Rumble match. When I got the decision from then-WWF president Jack Tunney, I went to the center of the ring to make the announcement and hesitated.... Did I just hear that from Mr. Tunney? I had to question that. So I went to Mr. Tunney and he told me that was correct: we had co-winners of the Royal Rumble. In all of my years of ring-announcing, I have never stopped to question an announcement that was given to me, but I did that time. That's something that I'll never forget.

Gaming's Greatest Couples

{ In celebration of Valentine's Day, we count down the greatest love stories ever manipulated via Control Pad. }

While playing a few rounds of The Beatles Rock Band recently, we were stunned by the assertion that "all you need is love." This surprised us because for the longest time, we were certain that all you needed was video games. That got us thinking—there's a happy intersection between the two: video game romances! The pairs on these pages have stuck together through thick and thin, through good times and bad, through cakes and kidnappings.

BY PHIL THEOBALD AND THE NINTENDO POWER STAFF



12

Sonic & Amy Rose

FROM: SONIC THE HEDGEHOG SERIES
LOVE METER: ♥ ♥ ♡♡♡♡♡♡♡♡

Adorable and pink, Amy Rose first appeared in the Sega CD game Sonic CD, where she had been kidnapped by Metal Sonic. After the real Sonic rescued her, it was revealed that Amy harbored a major crush on the blue dude. Even though Sonic doesn't necessarily share her affections, Amy has been following him around ever since. Unfortunately for Amy, Sonic is a bit of a loose cannon when it comes to the ladies. He's been seen canoodling with the likes of freedom fighter Princess Sally Acorn, and even Princess Elise—a human! Given Sonic's penchant for royalty, Amy is going to have to work extra hard to get him to really notice her. And if he doesn't, the persistent girl can always give him a bonk on the head with her trademark Piko Piko Hammer.

10

Fox McCloud & Krystal

FROM: STAR FOX SERIES
LOVE METER: ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♡♡♡♡♡

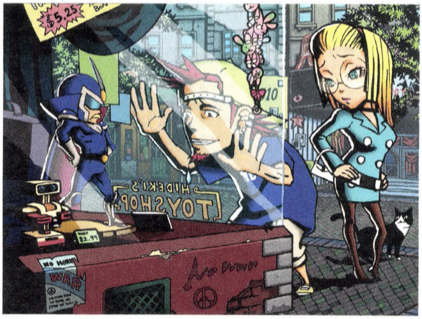
Long before *Avatar*'s Jake Sully fell for Neytiri, Star Fox's Fox McCloud fell in love with a sultry blue female on an alien world. Of course, the sultry blue female here is actually an anthropomorphic fox, but considering that Fox is, uh, a fox, it all works out! The two first met when Fox journeyed on a rescue mission to Dinosaur Planet. Krystal was also on the planet investigating the cause for her home world's destruction. Initially she was cold toward Fox, but after the defeat of the villainous General Scales and Andross, she softened to him. Since then, Krystal has joined the Star Fox team, and the couple has gone on many missions together. Unfortunately, their future is unclear. The multiple endings in Star Fox Command show many different fates for the two, ranging from marriage and parenthood to Krystal leaving Fox and joining his rivals on the Star Wolf team.

Travis Touchdown & Sylvia Christel

FROM: NO MORE HEROES SERIES
LOVE METER: ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♡♡♡♡♡♡

11

Travis Touchdown is not a complicated man. He likes pro wrestling, anime, and slicing up bad guys with beam katanas. And women, of course—especially women such as the sexy and sadistic Sylvia Christel. It doesn't matter to Travis that Sylvia has him fighting a series of over-the-top assassins; the idea of eventually hooking up with her makes it all worthwhile. Unfortunately, it turns out that it was just a tease, and Sylvia is married to Travis's twin brother, Henry. Bummer. Three years on, though, a now-divorced Ms. Christel appears before Travis once more and again uses feminine charms—and more importantly, the promise of revenge against those who killed Travis's best friend—to get him to fight even more crazy killers. This time around it seems that Sylvia has genuine feelings for Mr. Touchdown. It's actually kind of sweet in a messed up way.



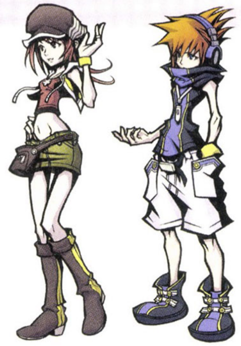
9

Viewtiful Joe & Silvia

FROM: VIEWTIFUL JOE SERIES

LOVE METER: ♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♡

Viewtiful Joe has got to be one of the luckiest guys in gaming. Every geek wants a girlfriend like Silvia. Not only is she hot (love those glasses!), but she doesn't even mind when her boyfriend drags her off to a toy store or to a monster-movie marathon (at least not too much). Plus, her dad is a famous movie director/superhero. The best part, though, is that she isn't the type to put up with being kidnapped. After Joe rescued Silvia from Movieland, she adopted her own superhero persona and now fights evil alongside her man. Assuming Joe doesn't let his pop-culture addiction come between them, these two will prove that the couple that pummels bad guys together stays together.



7

Neku & Shiki

FROM: THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU

LOVE METER: ♥♥♥♥♥♡♡♡♡♡

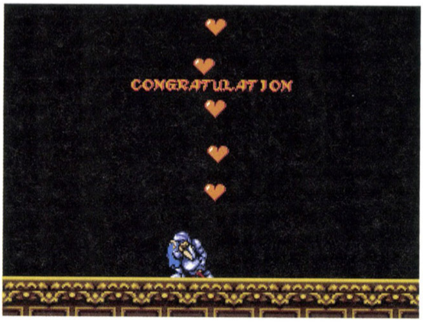
When we first meet Neku, he's a card-carrying member of the Square Enix Brooding Jerk club (founded and presided over by Final Fantasy VII's Cloud Strife). Shiki is cheerful and eminently likeable, but she's burdened by some serious self-confidence issues. The two meet under pretty stressful conditions—as reluctant partners in a surreal game of life and death—and they don't exactly hit it off right away. But the duo gradually forms a bond over the course of the ensuing travails, and their relationship leads each of them to become a better person. That seems like a pretty good criterion for what constitutes a great couple, even if the game leaves us wondering whether Neku and Shiki will ever become romantically involved.

8

Sir Arthur & Princess Prin Prin

FROM: GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS SERIES

LOVE METER: ♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♡♡♡



Poor Arthur and Prin Prin. It seems like every time they get together, all manner of demons and ghouls arrive to spirit away the unfortunate princess. The average couple might not be able to endure such hardships, but these two are clearly devoted to each other. Prin Prin knows that Arthur will unfailingly don his suit of armor and come after her. So devoted to Prin Prin is Arthur that he even went up against Satan himself to save the fair maiden. Not only that, but he has to complete each of his quests twice in order to save her. Now that's what we call true love, even if the two of them do have some odd ideas of what constitutes a good date. Seriously—in the NES game's intro, they were hanging out in a graveyard while Arthur was in his underwear. But who are we to judge?

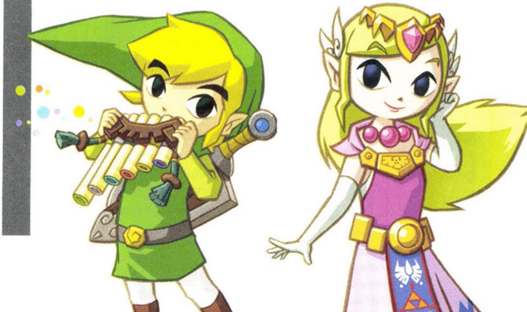
6

Link & Zelda

FROM: THE LEGEND OF ZELDA SERIES

LOVE METER: ♥♥♥♥♡♡♡♡♡♡

Throughout time, there have been multiple Princess Zeldas, and their lives have always been intertwined with those of a hero named Link. Something keeps bringing the two together, even across multiple generations. Still, even though Link has always been there to save Zelda, the couple has never officially become, well, a *couple*. They're always good friends, sure, but it never seems to develop into a full-on romantic relationship. In fact, Link occasionally develops feelings for other girls, such as Ilia and Marin. Given that the various Links and Zeldas appear to be descended from each other, this might be for the best. Even if that weren't the case, Link's constant snide "Excuuuuse me, princess!" remarks are bound to keep Zelda away at bay.



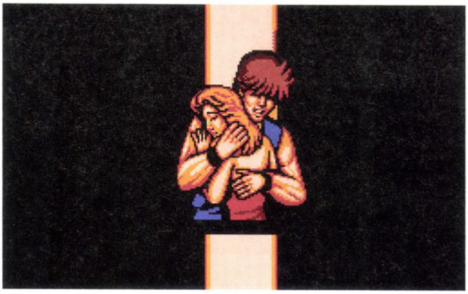
5

Billy Lee & Marian

FROM: DOUBLE DRAGON SERIES

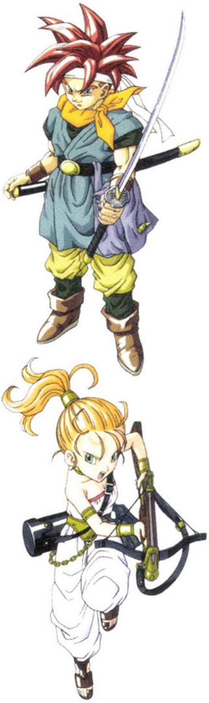
LOVE METER: ♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♡♡

Being the girlfriend of a street-fighting punk can be tough. It's even worse when your boyfriend has a twin brother and they're both fighting for your affections. In the original Double Dragon, Marian gets punched in the gut and carried off by the Shadow Warriors gang. Billy and his brother, Jimmy, rush to her rescue, but they ultimately battle *each other* to see which sibling she should be with. Sure, such behavior may come off as a bit sexist, but it's hard to question Billy's devotion. Later he takes on the entire Shadow Warriors gang again after the thugs kill Marian. In fact, he fought against them so hard that Marian *comes back to life!* How many guys can say that they've done *that* for their ladies?



4

Crono & Marle



FROM: CHRONO TRIGGER

LOVE METER: ♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♥♡

Princess Nadia is one of those princesses that easily grows bored with the royal life. She's prone to donning a disguise and sneaking out of her castle to look for adventure. During one such escapade (under the alias Marle) at the Millennial Fair, she meets the spiky-haired Crono, but a mishap tosses her back in time. Crono quickly rushes to her rescue, and the two set off on an adventure to save the future from a vile monster. Epic quests, as you know, are a fantastic way to find a partner, and Crono can't help but fall for the spunky Marle. Fairytale romances like these often have happy endings, and this loving couple decides to get married at the end of their quest.

Lonely Hearts Club

Alas, for all those happy couples in gaming, there will always be a few poor souls who seem destined to remain alone. Here's hoping that these lovelorn folk will someday find an ideal partner.

Wario

FROM: WARIO LAND SERIES/WARIOWARE SERIES

Wario really has no one to blame for his solo status but himself. He's too darn greedy to think of anybody else, and his poor hygiene doesn't help matters. His nasty gas problem combined with his foul garlic breath ensures that he will likely remain alone forever. Unless...could there be a Wapeach out there somewhere?

Samus Aran

FROM: METROID SERIES

Samus is not what you'd call an unattractive lass. You think there'd be guys all over her. In the Metroid games, however, that's not the case—evidently, trekking across the galaxy as a tough-as-nails bounty hunter leaves little time for romance.

Don Paolo

FROM: PROFESSOR LAYTON SERIES

Poor Don Paolo. All he wanted was the affection of a certain lovely young woman, but it was never to be. When he discovered that the object of his desire was in love with Professor Layton, this brilliant scientist vowed revenge on the good professor. Don Paolo's spiteful nature not only took over his life, but it caused his hair to twist into its current, ridiculous state.

Captain Falcon

FROM: F-ZERO SERIES

Captain Falcon is probably too busy scouring space for criminal scum (and entering racing tournaments) to settle down. However, we suspect that his lack of a partner stems not from his job, but from the fact that he won't stop requesting of ladies, "Show me your moves!" Toss in his insensitivity about murdering innocent Pikmin, and it's no wonder the fairer sex steers clear.

Bowser

FROM: SUPER MARIO SERIES

Obviously Bowser hasn't always been alone. He has a kid, after all! Nonetheless, given the slightest opportunity, the lovelorn Koopa King will grab Princess Peach and whisk her away to his castle. Like clockwork, Mario arrives to rescue the fair maiden, leaving Bowser rejected once more. It's not that Bowser doesn't genuinely love Peach; it's just that he has a terrible way of expressing his feelings.

Master Hand

FROM: SUPER SMASH BROS. SERIES

It's a giant hand. What do you expect? Nuff said!

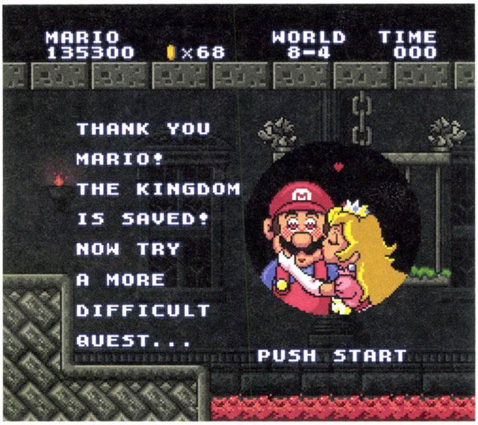
3

Solid Snake & Meryl Silverburgh

FROM: METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES

LOVE METER: ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♡♡♡♡♡♡

At one point in Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes, Snake's nerdy partner, Hal "Otacon" Emmerich, asks if Snake thinks love can bloom, even on a battlefield. Solid Snake knows that yes, it can. As he explains, "I think at any time, any place...people can fall in love with each other." The battle-hardened supersoldier experienced this for himself during the Shadow Moses Incident, when he met Meryl, the daughter of his former commanding officer (and a capable soldier in her own right). The two quickly fell for each other, and Snake even endured a grueling torture session to save Meryl's life. Sadly, the lives of soldiers can be difficult, and despite their feelings, the two lost touch after their mission. Meryl found a new beau while Snake turned into a decrepit old geezer. Incidentally, Otacon himself had a tragically brief infatuation with enemy soldier Sniper Wolf.



THANK YOU MARIO! THE KINGDOM IS SAVED! NOW TRY A MORE DIFFICULT QUEST...

Mario & Princess Peach

FROM: SUPER MARIO SERIES

LOVE METER: ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♡♡

2

As a pudgy plumber, Mario is hardly a stereotypical hero. Of course, as a human monarch to a kingdom of talking fungi, Peach is certainly not a typical princess. Perhaps it is their complementary oddities that make this couple so darn happy together. Over the years, Peach has realized that the way to her man's heart is through his stomach, and she always seems to have a cake ready to brighten Mario's day. Like good couples should, the two are always going out to parties, and they maintain a very active life through a variety of athletic pastimes. Toss in the occasional kidnapping by jealous reptiles, and you have a relationship that is never dull. Just don't mention the time Mario went to Princess Daisy's rescue. Or the times Mario has saved his old girlfriend, Pauline. Peach doesn't like that.

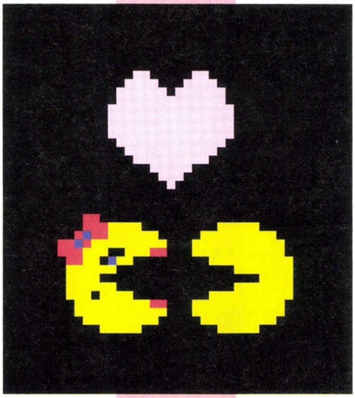
Pac-Man & Ms. Pac-Man

FROM: PAC-MAN SERIES

LOVE METER: ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥ ♥

Do you believe in love at first sight? Well, we know two yellow circles that do. They're arguably gaming's first couple, and they've been together for almost 30 years. Pac-Man and Ms. Pac-Man first met when they nearly bumped into each other while being chased by ghosts. The moment their eyes locked, that telltale heart popped up above their heads to signify true love. Their romance quickly blossomed, and soon the stork arrived to bring the couple's first baby into the world. At the risk of getting on Pac-Man's bad side, we have to admit that we're a bit enamored of his wife. Talk about curvy!

1



Because Jess plays video games the ESRB (that's the Entertainment Software Rating Board) understands that some games aren't right for everyone.
Just like movies, every game has a rating. And those ratings come from the ESRB.
TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

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www.ESRB.org

NiNTENDO DS ESSENTiALS

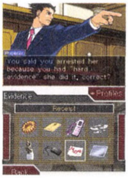
Looking to put together the **ultimate library** for gaming's hottest handheld? The NP crew identifies the titles that every DS owner should have.

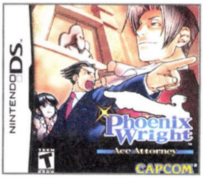
POWER
START
SELECT
X
Y
A
B
MIC

Not many platforms in the history of this great medium can lay claim to as impressive a software lineup as the Nintendo DS system. Nearly 3,000 titles have been released for the dual-screened handheld since its debut in 2004, providing a staggering level of variety for all types of players. Of course, the fact that you're reading this magazine indicates that you're more discerning than most (or you're just bored at the local bookstore), so we've put together our picks for the very best the DS has to offer. Some of these games were smash hits and others flew under the radar, but all of them are phenomenal experiences that deserve a place on your shelf.

THE MUST-HAVES

This is the crème de la crème. If you live in some oppressive land that allows you to own no more than 10 DS titles, make sure these are the ones you choose.


You said you arrested her because you had "hard evidence". She did it, correct?
Evidence
Profiles
Back

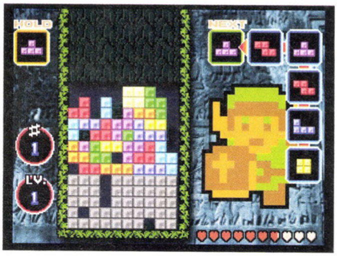

NINTENDO DS
Phoenix Wright
Ace Attorney
CAPCOM

PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY

Publisher: Capcom | Developer: Capcom

After a slow start, the DS library finally hit its stride in late 2005, thanks in large part to an up-and-coming lawyer with a penchant for dramatic pointing. The first Phoenix Wright is a refreshing work of genius that spawned what's become one of the handheld's distinguishing franchises.

NINTENDO DS
TETRIS DS
6 Different Game Modes!


HOLD
NEXT
LV.

TETRIS DS

Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: Nintendo

How do you make a timeless classic like Tetris even better? Fill it with retro graphics and sounds from classic Nintendo games. Add a wide range of fun bonus modes and both local and online multiplayer, and you've got the world's best way to while away hours at the airport.

THE WORLD ENDS WITH YOU

Publisher: Square Enix
Developer: Square Enix/Jupiter

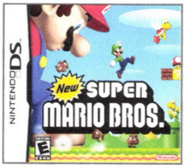
This phenomenal action-adventure deftly represents what the DS is all about. It's a bold, experimental effort that seems like a bit of a mess at first blush, but it all comes together brilliantly to offer something as deeply engaging as it is unique. Square Enix has produced a great body of work for the DS, and this stands as the company's finest.

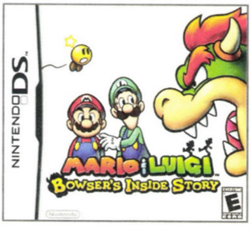
NINTENDO DS
The World Ends with You
SQUARE ENIX.

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS.

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo

The first side-scrolling Mario platformer since the Super NES days, New Super Mario Bros. delivers more of everything that made Mario's classic adventures great, plus unique new features such as the Mega Mushroom. But we don't need to tell you any of this because no Nintendo fan would be caught without Mario's only DS platformer in their collection, right?


NINTENDO DS
New SUPER MARIO BROS.


NINTENDO DS
MARIO & LUIGI
BOWSER'S INSIDE STORY

MARIO & LUIGI: BOWSER'S INSIDE STORY

Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: AlphaDream

With a delightfully wacky adventure that takes place partly inside Bowser's belly and has some of the nuttiest dialogue ever seen in a video game, Bowser's Inside Story is as funny as it is fun. Don't be scared away if you don't usually like RPGs; this one features a wealth of Mario-style action.

NINTENDO DS
MARIO KART DS

MARIO KART DS

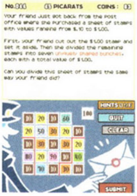
Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: Nintendo

While kart-crazy fanatics can compare the finer points of each entry in the storied racing series, there's no denying that all Mario Kart games are top titles for their respective systems. Mario Kart DS is one of the best with a wide selection of tracks and some of the top local multiplayer action on the DS.

PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE CURIOUS VILLAGE

Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: Level-5

Perhaps no series appeals to both casual and enthusiast players quite so well as Professor Layton. The tophatted hero's inaugural adventure introduced an inspired blend of puzzle-solving, exploration, and well-written mystery. It also set the stage for a pair of excellent sequels, and there are more on the way.



Your friend just got back from the post office where she purchased a sheet of stamps with values ranging from $.10 to $1.00.

First, your friend cut out the $1.00 stamp and set it aside. Then she divided the remaining stamps into seven uniquely shaped bunches, each with a total value of $1.00.

Can you divide this sheet of stamps the same way your friend did?

PICARATS
COINS:
HINTS
QUIT
CLEAR
SUBMIT

Professor Layton and the Curious Village
NINTENDO DS
Solve brainteasers to crack the case!

The Pokémon Company
Nintendo
NINTENDO DS
Pokémon HeartGold Version
Pokéwalker Accessory Included

Nintendo
The Pokémon Company
NINTENDO DS
Pokémon SoulSilver Version
Pokéwalker Accessory Included

POKÉMON HEARTGOLD AND SOULSILVER VERSIONS

Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: GAME FREAK inc.

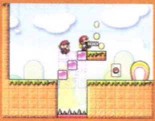
Remaking a classic isn't always a good idea, but the supertalented team at GAME FREAK inc. managed to improve upon the hit Game Boy Color titles Pokémon Gold and Silver Versions with updated graphics and a long list of new features. This near-perfect pair of Pokémon games offers what is perhaps the series's best pure role-playing experience.

DSiWARE ESSENTIALS

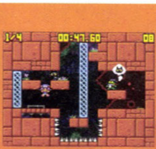
If you have access to the platform's digital offerings, download these titles posthaste.

CAVE STORY
Publisher: **Nicalis**
Nintendo DSi Points: **1,000**
ESRB: **Everyone 10+**

DARK VOID ZERO
Publisher: **Capcom**
Nintendo DSi Points: **500**
ESRB: **Everyone**



MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG: MINIS MARCH AGAIN!
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Nintendo DSi Points: **800**
ESRB: **Everyone**



MIGHTY FLIP CHAMPS!
Publisher: **WayForward**
Nintendo DSi Points: **800**
ESRB: **Everyone**

SHANTAE: RISKY'S REVENGE
Publisher: **WayForward**
Nintendo DSi Points: **1,2000**
ESRB: **Everyone 10+**

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SPIRIT TRACKS

Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: Nintendo

With a cool twist—Zelda is a ghost!—and challenging tag-team dungeons built around creative two-character puzzles, the second Legend of Zelda DS title outdoes the first. There is a lot to see and do and a train to take you to it all, which adds a charming rustic feel to the series's usual proceedings.

Menu
Save
Collection
Map
RailMap

NINTENDO DS
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
Spirit Tracks
Nintendo

NINTENDO DS
ELITE BEAT AGENTS
TOUCH

ELITE BEAT AGENTS

Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: iNiS

Among the greatest music games of all time, Elite Beat Agents is at once silly yet earnest, simple yet challenging. The titular trio's spirited escapades are guaranteed to put a smile on your face (before the final chapter brings a tear to your eye). So if this one's not in your collection, it's time to call for HEEEAAALP!

THE NEXT LEVEL

When you're ready to take your collection a bit farther, these are the selections to turn to. They further showcase the impressive breadth and depth of the DS library.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: Nintendo

It may have been outshone by its DS successor—The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks—but Phantom Hourglass is a top-class adventure. With fun and unique stylus controls that are used for everything from moving Link to making maps to using weapons, the title adds a fresh new feel to the series's timeless gameplay.

SUPER SCRIBBLENAUTS

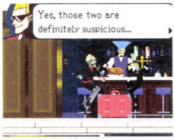
Publisher: Warner Bros. Interactive | Developer: 5th Cell

The first Scribblenauts blew minds with its "Write Anything, Solve Everything" concept, but it was hampered somewhat by a handful of awkward design choices. The follow-up smooths those wrinkles while introducing adjectives to the mix, leaving our imaginations to run wild.

CASTLEVANIA: DAWN OF SORROW

Publisher: Konami
Developer: Konami

While Castlevania has struggled to find its footing on consoles in recent years, the long-running series has remained consistently terrific on Nintendo's handhelds by sticking to its hand-drawn roots. For our money, Dawn of Sorrow is still the cream of the crop thanks to the innovative Tactical Soul system.



Yes, those two are definitely suspicious...

GHOST TRICK: PHANTOM DETECTIVE

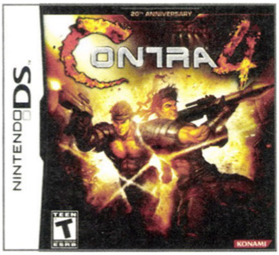
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: Capcom

Most companies tend to stick to the beaten path, so it's refreshing to see a powerhouse publisher such as Capcom venturing into unfamiliar territory. Part point-and-click adventure, part puzzle game, and part murder mystery, Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective is an inventive and unforgettable experience.

CONTRA 4

Publisher: Konami | Developer: WayForward

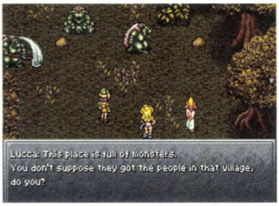
Western developers have a long, proud tradition of screwing up Contra, but the talented folks at WayForward finally got it right—so much so that Konami saw fit to add that long-awaited 4 to the title. Ridiculously over-the-top, brutally difficult, and visually stunning, this is pure action gaming at its finest.



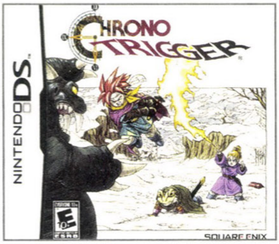
CHRONO TRIGGER

Publisher: Square Enix | Developer: Square Enix

Combining the creative talents of Squaresoft and Enix (in the pre-Square Enix era), Chrono Trigger for Super NES was a masterful RPG that featured indelible characters, gameplay, and music. The DS version builds upon this extraordinary foundation by adding cut-scenes, updated localization, and welcome gameplay tweaks.



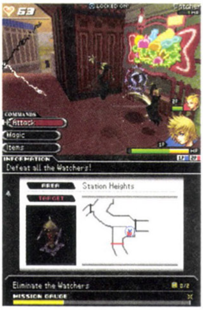
Lucca: This place is full of monsters.
You don't suppose they got the people in that village, do you?



KINGDOM HEARTS 358/2 DAYS

Publisher: Square Enix | Developer: Square Enix/h.a.n.d.

Set in the time between the original Kingdom Hearts and its sequel, 358/2 Days is a must-play for any fan of the series. It offers the signature brand of fast-paced combat, and the production values are among the best on DS. Plus, a touching narrative fleshes out the saga in ways that actually elevate the surrounding chapters.


COMMANDS
Attack
Magic
Items
INFORMATION
Defeat all the Watchers!
Station Heights
Eliminate the Watchers
MISSION GAUGE

Kingdom Hearts
358/2 Days
NINTENDO DS
SQUARE ENIX

NINTENDO DS
Kirby
SUPER STAR ULTRA

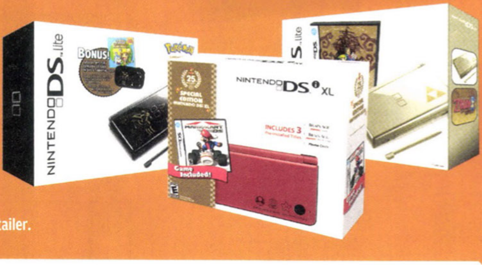
KIRBY SUPER STAR ULTRA

Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: Nintendo/HAL

What happens when you take one of the premier Kirby titles (Kirby Super Star for Super NES), enhance it with brand-new games and spiffier graphics, and make it portable? You get the best Kirby game on a handheld—if not the best Kirby game, period.

SUPER BY DESIGN

Nintendo has released quite a few special editions of the DS hardware over the years. If we had to choose our favorites, we'd go with these three. Please note, however, that you may no longer be able to find them at your local retailer.

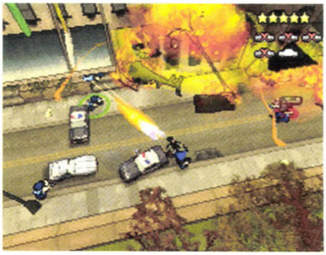

NINTENDO DS lite
BONUS!
NINTENDO DSi XL
SPECIAL EDITION
INCLUDES 3
Game Included!

GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS

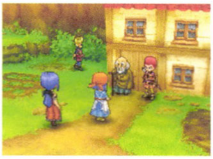
Publisher: Rockstar | Developer: Rockstar Leeds

In crafting its first DS title, Rockstar was incredibly ambitious. Here's a game that has impressive graphics, touch-screen elements, and the hallmarks of a Grand Theft Auto adventure—carjacking, driving, and shooting in a massive city teeming with shady characters—all on a single DS card.

NINTENDO DS
grand theft auto
CHINATOWN WARS



NINTENDO DS
DRAGON QUEST IX
Sentinels of the Starry Skies



DRAGON QUEST IX: SENTINELS OF THE STARRY SKIES

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Square Enix/Level-5

There aren't many games that can last hundreds of hours—and there are even fewer that you'd actually want to put that much time into—but completing quests in this mammoth RPG is still satisfying even after you've spent a good portion of your life playing it.

THE DEEP CUTS

Round out your collection with these offerings and those who gaze upon it will marvel at your impeccable taste in interactive entertainment. Just try not to act *too* snooty.

Professor Layton and the Unwound Future
Over 165 Puzzles!
Nintendo DS

PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE UNWOUND FUTURE

Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: Level-5

The third Professor Layton game features the same excellent mix of brain-teasing puzzles and point-and-click adventuring as its predecessors, plus it adds an extra layer of story that fleshes out the professor as well as his friends and foes. Also—Layton takes off his top hat!

Sonic Rush
SEGA
Nintendo DS

SONIC RUSH

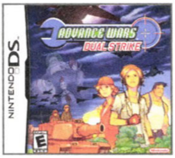
Publisher: Sega | Developer: Sonic Team/Dimps

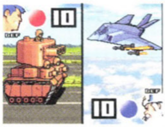
The 2D Sonic Rush follows a different formula than its 16-bit forebearers, downplaying the traditional platforming part of the equation in favor of a greater focus on raw speed. That may stick in the craws of the Blue Blur's most orthodox fans, but taken on its own merits, Sonic Rush is a heck of a good time.

ADVANCE WARS: DUAL STRIKE

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Intelligent Systems

One of our biggest Game Boy Advance addictions, the Advance Wars series made the transition to Nintendo's next handheld without missing a beat. In fact, Dual Strike may be the best entry in the franchise's storied history. You know you're hooked when even your dreams start taking place on a grid.


Advance Wars Dual Strike
Nintendo DS

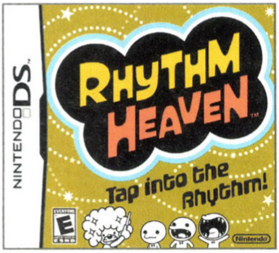


MARIO & LUIGI: PARTNERS IN TIME

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: AlphaDream

Though it doesn't quite match the comedic brilliance of Bowser's Inside Story (not enough Fawful), the first Mario & Luigi title for DS is a must-play nonetheless. The writing is as sharp as always, few RPGs boast a more consistently entertaining battle system, and the baby versions of our heroic plumbers add some new (and adorable) twists.

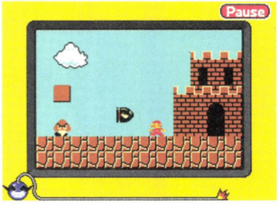
Mario & Luigi
Partners in Time
Nintendo DS

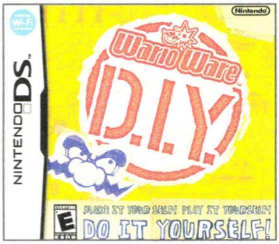

Rhythm Heaven
Tap into the Rhythm!
Nintendo DS

RHYTHM HEAVEN

Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: Nintendo

Plastic guitars are fun, but sometimes you want to tap your toe to a different kind of music game; few are as fun or addictive as Rhythm Heaven. With a slew of quick-fix minigames that test your rhythm and tickle your funny bone, this quirky charmer is a perfect game to play on the go.



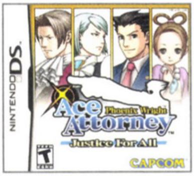

WarioWare D.I.Y.
Make it yourself! Play it yourself!
Do it yourself!
Nintendo DS

WARIOWARE: D.I.Y.

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo/Intelligent Systems

For those of us who lack the skill or ambition to create our own video games, WarioWare: D.I.Y. offers a bite-sized taste of the development process. The tools are intuitive yet surprisingly robust, and for better or for worse, we can share our creations with the rest of the world via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection.

It was a battle today in
court, wasn't it...
Mr. Phoenix Wright!?


NINTENDO DS
Ace Attorney
Phoenix Wright
Justice For All
CAPCOM

PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY JUSTICE FOR ALL

Publisher: Capcom | Developer: Capcom

In many ways Justice for All is the best title in the Ace Attorney series. Though not as groundbreaking as its precursor, this second installment brings additional gameplay features (such as breaking through suspects' Psyche-Locks), entertaining new characters, and some of the most amusing writing on DS.

FUTURE ESSENTIALS?

All eyes are turning to the Nintendo 3DS system in 2011, but there are still lots of great titles coming for the original dual-screened handheld. Here are the ones we think are most likely to earn a spot on future versions of this list.

**Titles have not yet been announced for North America.*

MONSTER TALE
Publisher: **Majesco**
Developer: **DreamRift**
Release: **March 2011**

NI NO KUNI
Publisher: **Level-5**
Developer: **Level-5**
Release: **Unknown***

OKAMIDEN
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **Capcom**
Release: **March 2011**

What will Snivy do?

POKÉMON BLACK VERSION / POKÉMON WHITE VERSION
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **GAME FREAK inc.**
Release: **March 2011**

PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE SPECTER'S FLUTE
Publisher: **Level-5**
Developer: **Level-5**
Release: **Unknown***

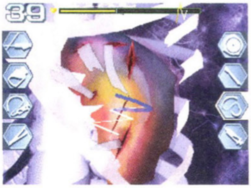
NINTENDO DS
Pokémon
PLATINUM VERSION

POKÉMON PLATINUM VERSION

Publisher: Nintendo | Developer: GAME FREAK inc.

This beefed-up addition to Pokémon Diamond and Pearl Versions features a new story, new forms of Pokemon not previously seen, a new area called the Distortion World, and more. All of these extras come on top of what was already a stuffed set of gameplay features, and online options that are among the series's best.

TRAUMA CENTER
UNDER THE KNIFE 2
NINTENDO DS
ATLUS

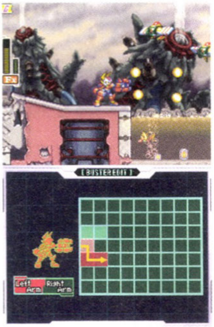


TRAUMA CENTER: UNDER THE KNIFE 2

Publisher: Atlus | Developer: Atlus

The first Trauma Center game was a landmark title for the DS. It demonstrated that it was possible to create an intense, fast-paced, hardcore game that boasted a unique premise and was possible only on the DS hardware. The sequel utilizes the same fantastic formula, but with a less infuriating difficulty level.

NINTENDO DS
MEGAMAN ZX
CAPCOM

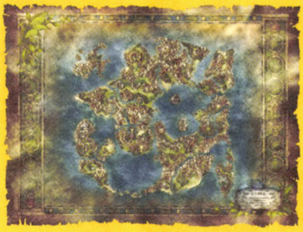

Left Arm
Right Arm

MEGA MAN ZX

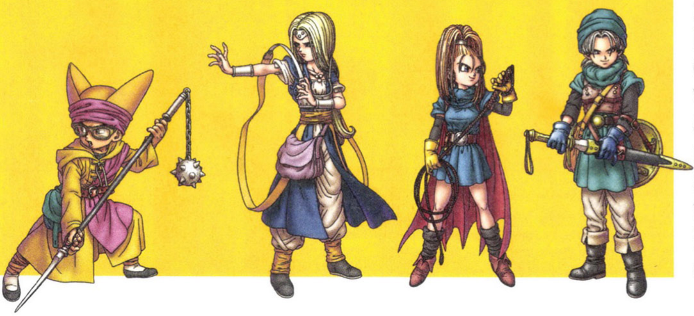
Publisher: Capcom | Developer: Inti Creates

The successor to the Mega Man Zero franchise, ZX provides the same variety of finely balanced, precisely controlled action, then takes it to the next level with a wide array of new powers and an interconnected, Metroid-esque world. Just come prepared for a whooping—Zero's adversaries don't mess around.

THE QUEST OF BOTH WORLDS



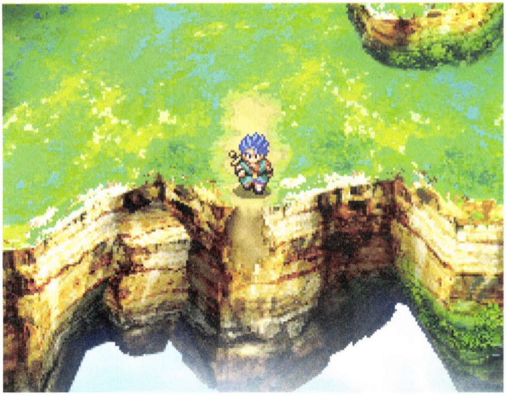
Explore the mysteriously linked worlds of **Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation** as the series's lost chapter finally arrives on Nintendo DS.



Fifteen years after the cancellation of the Super NES version of Dragon Quest VI, North American fans will finally be able to get their hands on the series's last unreleased installment. This elusive title nearly slipped away for a second time; despite plans to release Arte Piazza's entire trilogy of remakes for the Nintendo DS system, Dragon Quest VI vanished from Square Enix's schedule after the releases of Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen and Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride. Fortunately, after raising the profile of the franchise with the release of Dragon Quest IX, Nintendo has picked up the title for a February release. Now if Dragon Quest fans can only avoid worldwide silicon shortages and life-ending meteor strikes for another few weeks, their Dragon Quest libraries will finally be complete.

BY **CASEY LOE**

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** DEVELOPER: **SQUARE ENIX/ARTE PIAZZA** RELEASE: **FEBRUARY 2011** **DS**



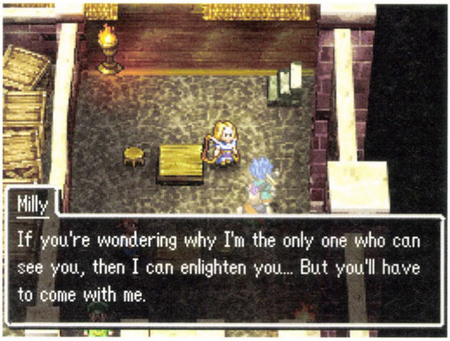
[Left] Chasms like these offer painful passage to the world below.

WORLDS APART

The focus of Dragon Quest VI is the titular Realms of Revelation, a parallel world that the hero stumbles into early on his quest. This new world and his home world share similar geographic features, host many of the same locations, and are populated by many of the same people. But on closer inspection, the worlds are full of interesting differences. Some are subtle; different rulers in the same cities, or characters with the same names who are at different points in their lives. Others are not so subtle, like the massive fissures torn into the fabric in one world that have no counterpart in the other.

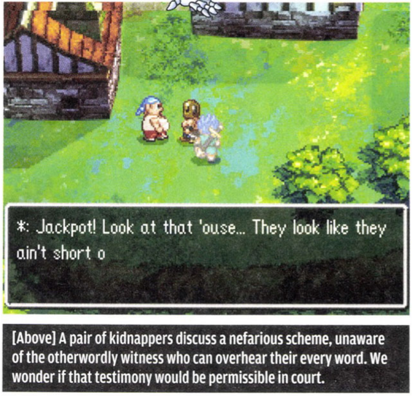
When creating the original Super Famicom version of Dragon Quest VI in the early '90s, series creator and writer/director Yuji Horii wanted to play off of the popular trend of having RPGs surprise players with an uncharted continent or new planet in the middle of the game. "I thought it would be interesting to present the two worlds from the very beginning, and have the player traverse between them," he explains. The focus would not be on revealing the world's existence, but revealing the reason for its existence. Instead of spelling out what's going on, Yuji Horii filled the game with quests that show the two realms interacting in mysterious ways, letting players assemble clues and draw their own conclusions. Are they parallel dimensions? Does one represent the past and the other the future? Are they the same world split in two by some mysterious force? Is one world a virtual-reality simulation being hosted in the other? The answer could be any of these—except for the virtual-reality one, because that would be stupid. "Going into too many details would spoil the game," teases Horii, "but I'm very fond of the earth-shattering revelation that awaits players."

When your hero first arrives in the other world, he is invisible and intangible, able only to passively observe the events that occur there. This allowed Horii to set up a number of unique side quests in which the members of the player's party are the sole witnesses to quest-inciting events, but are unable to save the day in the usual heroic fashion. You'll witness everything from a kidnapping to the attempted murder of a dog, but have to sit back and bite your intangible tongue until you finally gain a material form and can begin unraveling these crimes long



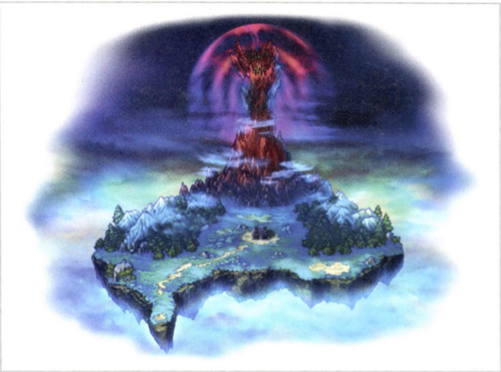
Milly

If you're wondering why I'm the only one who can see you, then I can enlighten you... But you'll have to come with me.



*: Jackpot! Look at that 'ouse... They look like they ain't short o

[Above] A pair of kidnappers discuss a nefarious scheme, unaware of the otherwordly witness who can overhear their every word. We wonder if that testimony would be permissible in court.



[Below] Throwing a penny down a well won't always bring good luck.

Dood takes 25 points of damage!

Follow
Orders
Dood
HP 73
MP 26
Lv.: 10
Carver
HP 65
MP 0
Lv.: 8
Fight
Party
Tactics
Flee

after they were committed.

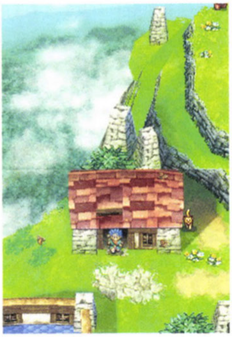
Beyond its role as the greater mystery of the game, the interplay between the two worlds ensures a large supply of quests that wouldn't be possible in any other game, providing a much more interesting experience than the usual series of fetch-this and kill-that errands that are necessary to keep players traveling from one end of an RPG to the other. Instead of merely providing distractions, each side quest offers another piece of a larger puzzle, and when players finally do solve the mystery, the plot takes a surprising turn. The ever-evolving storyline provides one of the most interesting aspects of Dragon Quest VI, and keeps the game fresh throughout its lengthy running time by providing a different experience at each stage of the game.

DOUBLE YOUR TREASURE

The two-realms concept offers some other nice benefits. Each realm is roughly the size of the entire world in Dragon Quest V, so players can look forward to a game that is nearly twice as long as its predecessor. Dragon Quest VI also offers significantly more freedom to explore; acquiring a new mode of transportation, for example, might make multiple towns, dungeons, and castles accessible in each of the worlds. Don't expect a flashing arrow to point you in the right direction; the storyline in the latter half of the game is very open-ended, and players are expected to roam the realms in search of the clues that will lead them to the next step of their quest.

If two worlds full of old-school RPG questing isn't enough to keep you busy, Dragon Quest VI offers a host of distractions, from the traditional casino to a Slime Arena and even a fashion tournament. There are plenty of hidden caves and dungeons to explore, and lots of challenging post-game content. Dragon Quest VI even features a new implementation of the Tag Mode from Dragon Quest IX, with a special area for guests dropping by from other players' worlds. Additionally, players will be able to create representations

Fight
Party
Tactics
Flee



[Right] You might as well torch your charmingly bucolic hometown now, hero, and save your enemies the trouble.

of themselves that express their hopes and dreams to other players. (We haven't been able to see this in action yet, unfortunately.) The only downside to the game's ballooning size is that while Koichi Sugiyama's peppy classical tunes are as good as ever (the tower music may be one of the most infectiously memorable pieces of music in RPG history), the amount of variety in the game's soundtrack hasn't kept pace with the length of its main quest.

DOFFING THE KID GLOVES

A more open world isn't the only way in which Yuji Horii sought to challenge his players. "When I looked back at [Dragon Quest IV and V], I thought to myself, 'Are the battles becoming too easy?' Parties weren't being wiped out much anymore, so in Dragon Quest VI, I wanted to make combat thrilling again." The famously spiky difficulty of the original Dragon Quest VI has been toned down in the DS remake, but the game still provides a much steeper challenge than its predecessors.

Of course, it wouldn't be fair to beef up the opposition without giving players the tools necessary to come out on top, and to do so, Horii created a new version of the job system that was first introduced in Dragon Quest III. Players can assign their characters a wide variety of battlefield occupations, from Thief to Priest to Dancer, and upon mastering those, players can

THE COMPLETE DRAGON QUEST LIBRARY

The Dragon Quest series may not make for the prettiest of bookshelves when lined up spine-to-spine; some arrived only as remakes, and several of them still say "Dragon Warrior" on the box (Enix didn't get the North American rights to the Dragon Quest name until 2005). But with the release of Dragon Quest VI, we finally have an English-language version available for every numbered game in the series—including the most recent version of each!

DRAGON WARRIOR

Dragon Quest

AVAILABLE VERSIONS:
NES - 1989 GBC - 2000

Dragon Quest wasn't the first RPG to hit the NES, but it was arguably the first good one, laying the groundwork for a burgeoning genre and proving that there was an eager audience for more-cerebral fare on home consoles. By modern standards the game is short, difficult, and extremely clumsy, but a 2000 remake for the Game Boy Color (Dragon Warrior I & II) did a good job of fixing the latter two problems while remaining faithful to the spirit of the original.

DRAGON WARRIOR II

Dragon Quest II

AVAILABLE VERSIONS:
NES - 1990 GBC - 2000

Enix wasted little time in capitalizing on the success of Dragon Quest, quickly producing a sequel that established many enduring traditions of the series—including a party of three heroes, enemies who attack in groups (the first DQ was a strictly one-on-one affair), status ailments like Poison, and the ability to travel to new landmasses by ship. A smoothed and improved version was released as part of Dragon Warrior I & II for the Game Boy Color.

DRAGON WARRIOR III
RPG

Dragon Quest III

AVAILABLE VERSIONS:
NES - 1991 GBC - 2001

Dragon Quest III was a landmark title, and many longtime fans regard it as the best game in the series. This prequel brought real depth to the series with the addition of player-created characters, a job-change system, a day-and-night cycle, and a beefier story that kicked off a long tradition of shocking plot twists. A well-received Super Famicom remake never made it to the West, but most of its graphical upgrades and added features can be found in the 2001 Game Boy Color version.

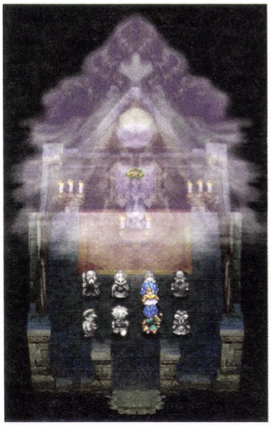
DRAGON WARRIOR IV
Experience this epic, multi-quest RPG!

Dragon Quest IV

AVAILABLE VERSIONS:
NES - 1992 DS - 2008

Released long after most RPG fans had moved on to the Super NES, the NES version of Dragon Quest IV was widely overlooked (and has become something of a collector's item). But Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen gave DS owners a chance to revisit this experimental installment, in which each party character gets to star in a stand-alone quest before teaming up for the main story. Dragon Quest IV broke little ground mechanically, but its heroes rank among the series's most beloved characters.

Dood
Carver



[Left] A mysterious spirit guide uses her ample cleavage to guide the hero's quest.

Dragon Quest V

AVAILABLE VERSIONS: DS - 2009

Despite wildly popular Japanese releases on both the Super Famicom and the PlayStation 2, Yuji Horii's favorite installment never saw a Western release until Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride hit the Nintendo DS. Despite the long wait, the game was met with an enthusiastic reception from critics and fans. Like its predecessor, DQV focuses more on a narrative experiment than new mechanics, and it easily offers the most touching and memorable story in the series.

Dragon Quest VII

AVAILABLE VERSIONS: PS - 2001

The transition from the Super NES to the PlayStation was not an easy one, and development of Dragon Quest VII dragged on for nearly five years. The game finally debuted to massive sales in Japan but a mixed reception in the West. It remains a divisive chapter; some fans hate its slow pacing and new graphics style (which was later used in the series's DS remakes), while others love its inventive structure and record-shattering 100-plus-hour length. Now that DQVI has had its turn, we'd love to see a DQVII remake on the Nintendo 3DS handheld.

Dragon Quest VIII

AVAILABLE VERSIONS: PS2 - 2005

With beautiful cel-shaded 3D characters and environments and movie-style event scenes, new developer Level-5 made a visual masterpiece out of a series that was famous for dated graphics. A newly merged Square Enix also put some muscle behind the localization, adding professional voice acting and an orchestrated soundtrack. Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King is an impressive game, but some longtime fans feel the focus on presentation led to a generic storyline and an overly simple battle system.

Dragon Quest IX

AVAILABLE VERSIONS: DS - 2010

Dragon Quest returned to Nintendo platforms with its ninth installment, a bold and well-received reinvention of the series that added wireless multiplayer features, downloadable quests, and a clever implementation of the Nintendo DS system's Wi-Fi capability with Tag mode. It remains to be seen if this installment will be viewed as a one-time experiment or mark a turning point from traditional single-player adventures to a new focus on social and multiplayer features.

combine their characters' talents to pursue more-powerful hybrid vocations such as Ranger, Paladin, and Sage. A character never forgets the skills learned while pursuing a job, so a warrior, for example, can keep slinging spells long after he's abandoned the path of wizardry to focus on martial training.

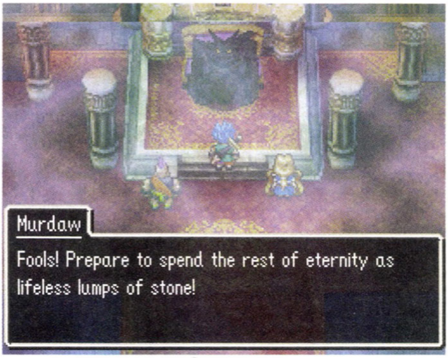
This system should sound familiar to longtime Dragon Quest fans (variants of it appear in many of the games, including Dragon Quest IX), but Dragon Quest VI approaches the class-change mechanic with a very different philosophy. While other titles in the series reset a character's level when he changes jobs, Dragon Quest VI dishes out no penalty at all; characters are free to switch jobs as often as they like without suffering any setback in terms of their growth. A character's individual level and weapon proficiencies are separate from his job, so he'll never lose hit points or have to change gear to pursue a new vocation. This all-upside class system allows characters to accumulate pages full of skills and spells and create jack-of-all-trades characters that can excel at everything players want them to. The wide assortment of abilities allows players to formulate deeper strategies for the game's tough boss fights, and when those strategies fail, the preponderance of jobs to pursue takes the sting out of having to grind for experience points, by ensuring that characters are constantly learning new things.

The battles in Dragon Quest VI may look and feel the same as they did in the series's previous two DS remakes, but they play out quite differently now that the basic debuff-and-attack strategies are no longer sufficient against the game's most powerful foes.

REALMS OF INNOVATION

Dragon Quest IV and V focus primarily on the personal travails of the game's cast of heroes, but Dragon Quest VI marks a sharp change in direction. The characters are relatively thinly written, with

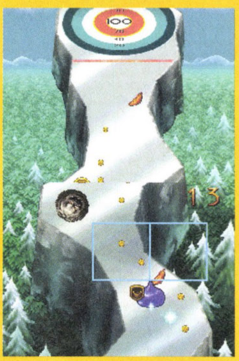
[Below] Did you even play Dragon Quest V, Murdaw? The whole turn-to-statue thing tends not to be such a permanent solution.



Murdaw

Fools! Prepare to spend the rest of eternity as lifeless lumps of stone!

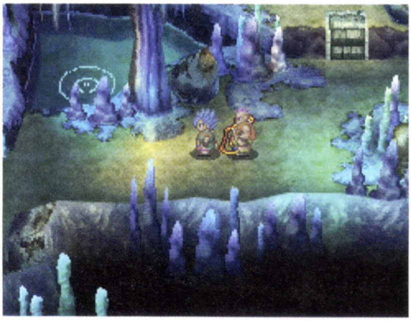
PARTNERS IN SLIME



Yuji Horii likes to add a few new features to each of his DS remakes, and it's not hard to tell what was on his mind when Dragon Quest VI's turn rolled around: Slimes, and lots of 'em. The two new Slime-based features aren't quite as substantial as the new chapter in Dragon Quest IV or the new bride in Dragon Quest V, but they do offer plenty of new ways to enjoy the series' gooey blue mascot.

One is Slippin' Slime, an arcade minigame that players can challenge in the lobbies of certain inns. Slippin' Slime is based on the oft-mocked Winter Olympics sport of curling, in which one player slides a heavy stone while their teammates brush the ice with brooms to control its speed and spin. Slippin' Slime copies the basic idea, but replaces the stone with a Slime and the brooms with your stylus. At first your goal is simply to sweep your Slime into the target, but as you progress to higher levels the game adds point-boosting Medals, speed-increasing seeds, enemy obstacles, and other irreverent twists that would make the president of the World Curling Federation snap her curling broom in disgust.

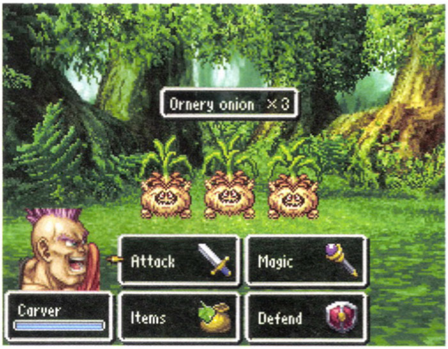
Horii has also added a number of Slime characters that can be recruited as party members. In the original version of Dragon Quest VI, characters with the Beastmaster class could recruit enemy monsters, but the feature proved underpowered and unpopular; no one wanted to waste party slots on monsters when they were busy trying to unlock the high-level jobs for their superior human characters. So in this installment, the playable monsters have been cut back to eight unique Slimes that are recruitable through new in-game events. As in the original version, there's plenty of exclusive equipment for your gelatinous friends, and a Slime Arena where they can fight for prizes and glory.

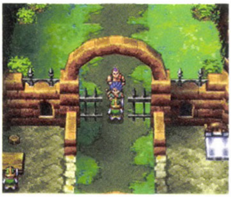


[Above] Not the first cave in DQ history, but definitely the prettiest.

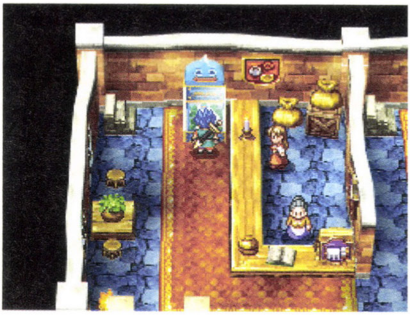
little in the way of personalities or backstory, but the emphasis on the mysterious phenomenon of the multiple realms gives the game a central mystery and sci-fi flavor that was a first for the series (but would not be the last). Dragon Quest VI also makes great strides in bringing challenge and depth back to the combat system, and is a major step in the franchise's transition from focused 20-to-30-hour quests to voluminous epics with evolving objectives and multiple worlds' worth of content.

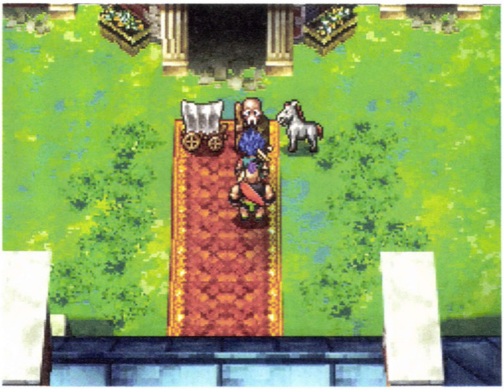
Dragon Quest VI isn't as flashy as other RPGs on the DS—it uses the same aging engine as the earlier remakes of Dragon Quest IV and V. Dragon Quest games have often looked dated in comparison to their rivals, but that hasn't stopped the series from emerging as one of the most popular and influential franchises in video game history. Dragon Quest VI concludes a trilogy of titles that charted a fascinating period in the history of role-playing games, as the genre abandoned thin fantasy clichés to experiment with innovative methods of storytelling, pacing and structure. The now-complete trilogy of DS remakes reveals how Dragon Quest led the charge every step of the way.





[Below] There's always time for a free round of Slippin' Slime.





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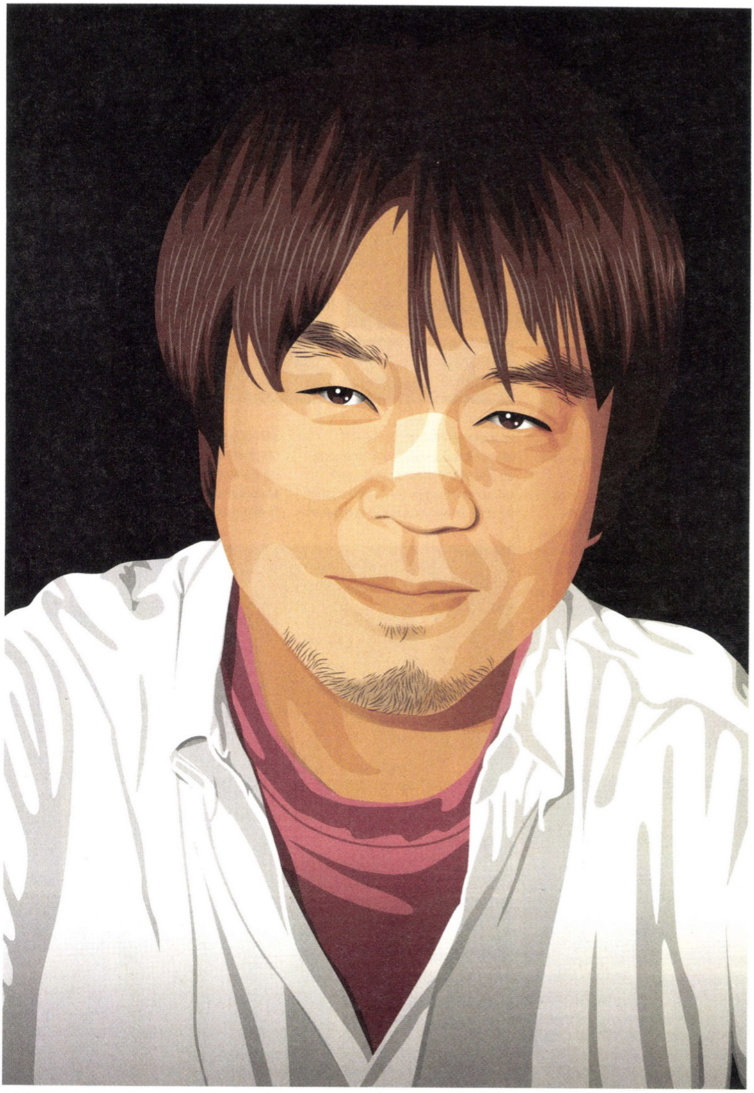
Power Profiles



DATE OF BIRTH
February 4, 1968

BIRTHPLACE
Osaka, Japan

POSITION
Producer, Capcom

BEST KNOWN FOR
Working on numerous hit Capcom titles, his nose bandage

FAVORITE FOOD
Any chicken or pork meal

CURRENT PROJECTS
Okamiden,
Ace Attorney Investigations 2

Motohide Eshiro

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA EMPEDOCLES

Motohide Eshiro has pretty much done it all in the world of Japanese video games. When he joined Capcom in 1990, his first assignment was as a programmer on the coin-op version of Street Fighter II, which revolutionized the arcade scene and became one of gaming's biggest hits. After contributing his programming prowess to numerous other projects (including helping to develop Capcom's CPS3 arcade circuit board), he made the jump to game designer, then director, and eventually producer. Most recently Eshiro has found success on the Nintendo DS handheld, guiding the teams responsible for Ace Attorney Investigations: Miles Edgeworth and Okamiden, the highly anticipated handheld sequel to Okami. Given Eshiro's knack for being involved with high-quality products, any title he's associated with is sure to pique gamers' interests.

NINTENDO POWER **How did you originally get into the video game business?**

MOTOHIDE ESHIRO I've been interested in games since I was a kid—ever since the big Space Invaders craze back in the day—and that's what really turned me on to gaming. But before I was working in the gaming industry I was working in a completely unrelated field. From the time I was 18, for about three years I was working as a photocopy [machine] repairman. I was an engineer for photocopy machines. But I really wanted to get into the game industry. So after that I entered vocational school to study programming, and then once I graduated that I joined Capcom.

What was it that made you come to Capcom, specifically?

Well, I've always loved Capcom games—in particular the arcade games. One of the ones that I'd played was Forgotten Worlds, and then the original Street Fighter, or Fighting Street as it was called [on the TurboGrafx CD]. So mainly my heyday was the arcade games I was really into, specifically the Capcom games. So that's one of the reasons why I wanted to join Capcom. And then, later, they were working on the CP System 2 [arcade board], and I really wanted to get involved with that.

What was it like having been a fan of the original Street Fighter and getting to work on Street Fighter II?

I was ecstatic. It was a dream come true for me to be able to be involved in the project like that, and every day it was just fun working on the project. And we had fun every day because...I was involved with certain characters in making sure they were right. So I would have to test them out against other people's characters and every day we were just fighting each other with the characters we were working on. But, because I was working on Guile, I made his Flash Kick just a little more powerful just so I could win. But the director, [Akira] Nishitani-san, found out and...he got really mad! [Laughs]

When you were working on Street Fighter II, was there a sense that it was going to be as big a hit as it was?

Well, we knew from working on it that it was really fun to play, and we knew that if you just got your hands on it, it would be fun. And that was the problem—trying to give people the opportunity to play—because at that time in Japan we didn't really have that versus one-on-one arcade game system in place. But we knew that was fun, if you could play someone else with this game. So we had to create a new kind of arcade cabinet for it. Once that got out to the people, they just loved it, so we knew it would be a hit with them once they tried it.

A lot of the old arcade games used pseudonyms for the people who worked on them. Did you have a nickname in the credits of Street Fighter II?

Yeah, I had one. What was it? I think my name was Ecchro!! Because my name is Eshiro, and then people call me Echiro, and it was kind of a play on a Japanese word because Echi means someone who kinda likes off-color humor and things like that.

Did you enjoy working on Darkstalkers?

It was really fun to work on Darkstalkers, and the main reason was because around that time was when Capcom tried to create a shift in their style of art for the games they were making. If you remember Street Fighter II, it was more of a—for the graphics that were available back then—realistic art style, as we called it, especially in terms of the musculature and the shadows and things like that. Whereas when we decided to create Darkstalkers we wanted to make it more like animation. We wanted more fluid movements in the characters, and this animation feel that you didn't get from playing Street Fighter. The characters would just move and behave differently, so it was really fun to be able to work on them. I was working on Felicia and Talbain and just coming up with the different moves and making Talbain just launch across the screen, and things like that.... And then for Felicia, actually, because I was the programmer on the game and being able to program all these different things I was able to invent—if you will—the way Felicia behaves in the game. And so when I was programming her and all her different movements,

GAMEOGRAPHY

Though he now works as a producer, Eshiro got his start as a programmer working on arcade games such as Street Fighter II (programming American fighters Guile and Balrog) and Darkstalkers (programming Felicia the cat-woman and Jon Talbain the werewolf).

STREET FIGHTER II: THE WORLD WARRIOR
1991, ARCADE
PROGRAMMER

THREE WONDERS
1991, ARCADE
PROGRAMMER

VARTH
1992, ARCADE
PROGRAMMER

DARKSTALKERS: THE NIGHT WARRIORS
1994, ARCADE
PROGRAMMER

I came up with a few of her special moves in the game just as a result of the programming I was doing. I showed them to the head designer and he liked them and so they made it into the game.

What made you make the transition from programmer to designer?
It was probably around the time we got our first PlayStation 2 dev kits at the company.... [I'd been] programming for over 10 years, and there were so many different things I was able to do as a programmer, but there is always so much more that you want to be able to do. And, of course, being a designer is also one of those things that you want to do. You have all these ideas that you want to try to bring to life, and so basically when the PS2 dev kits came in, I just talked to my boss and said, "I've done programming. Now I would like to try my hand at designing," and he let me do it.

And the transition went well for you.
Well, it wasn't as smooth as I would have liked.... Programming and designing are two different things, and the way [you must] think is kind of different. But the fact that programming is basically making the game at the core level—that really helped me transition to my job as a designer. Designers are involved with all the planning aspects and scheduling and all those things, [and] programming is a very logical job. That logical way of thinking really served me as being a successful designer because I was able to keep myself organized.

You directed Shadow of Rome, which was one of the first games that Capcom started pushing to be aimed more toward Western audiences. How did that influence development of the title?
Yeah, you could say that that was when we started aiming for a global project. The producer at the time was [Keiji] Inafune-san, and what he wanted was a game that could be played throughout the world. That was his aim, and I just finished working on Onimusha 2, so I was asked to join this project and we decided to go with gladiators. It's something classical so it's something that could appeal to almost anyone, we thought.... Also, we did research for this game. We even went to Rome. We took pictures; we looked at all the architecture—the art style that the Romans used—and we tried to incorporate that into the game as much as possible. Around that time you had a few other hits in the West, like the game Hitman, and GTA was gaining popularity, so we knew these were the types of games, the action games, that people overseas were really into at the time. We wanted to create a game that would appeal to those sensibilities, but also had the kind of Japanese flavor to it.

> *"I think your way of thinking has to change depending on the game's concept itself."*

Now you're working on Okamiden, and that's very Japanese. Does that require a different mindset?
I think your way of thinking has to change depending on the game's concept itself. You have to focus on what the game's actual concept is, and for each game that is always different, obviously. So for Shadow of Rome, the whole point was to make this action game that would have an appeal to the overseas market. With Okamiden the whole point of this game was not just to target the Japanese audience specifically, but to create a game that can showcase Japanese art style, Japanese culture, and Japanese mythology. Because it's such a Japanese-influenced game, it's something that could probably only be made in Japan. But that's not to say it's just for Japanese people; it's just that the art style that's influenced the game is Japanese.... So, going back to what you said: yes, your way of thinking has to be different for the different types of games just because what you're trying to achieve with each game is different.

Do you feel like you accomplished everything you wanted to with Ace attorney Investigations?
There were a few restrictions placed upon us because of the development schedule, so from that point of view...there were some things that were left undone in my mind. The director was happy with everything he was able to put into the game, so from that point of view I thought it was a success, but then after the game came out and we got to see it out there and the fans played it we thought, "Ah, yeah, I wanted to do this, this, and this. I wish *that* had been in the game." So now we've made an announcement in Japan about Ace Attorney Investigations 2, so hopefully all the things that we weren't able to do in the first we will be able to do in the second.

If you'd had more time with the game, how would it have been different?
Well, if I had my druthers I would have liked to see more of when you're investigating the crime scenes in the game. Like, the whole flow from start to end—I would like to see more done with that. You just look at the one part of the crime scene; I would have liked to see from start to finish just everything around that. And I thought the system in the game for investigation was a little complicated—maybe [more] complicated than what people were expecting from an Ace Attorney

GAMEOGRAPHY

55
KEN
ZANGIEF

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 2
1996, SEGA SATURN
PROGRAMMER

ONIMUSHA: WARLORDS
2001, PLAYSTATION 2
PLANNER

ONIMUSHA 2: SAMURAI'S DESTINY
2002, PLAYSTATION 2
DIRECTOR

SHADOW OF ROME
2005, PLAYSTATION 2
DIRECTOR

game—and so I would have liked to see that system a little more simplified, if possible. Also, if we had time I would have liked to have done more with your partners in the game, like the little minigames in there—I would like to add more of those and expand on them if we had time.

I don't suppose you have anything to say to North American fans who are hoping to hear something about playing the sequel?
All I can say right now for the fans of Investigations is, "Your voices are being heard, and the best thing you can do is tell other people about it and increase the fan base for the Investigations series!"

Why was Detective Gumshoe such a wimp in Ace Attorney Investigations?
[Laughs] Yeah, why? That's a good question. In the Ace Attorney series he's...really involved in the investigations and whatnot, and he is more spirited, if you will. But in this game he kind of takes a backseat, I guess. I still think he is a cool character overall, no matter which series he appears in.... Miles Edgeworth is this cool, calm character, and I think the contrast between him and Detective Gumshoe worked really well in Investigations.

Why did Capcom decide to bring Ace Attorney Investigations 2 to the DS instead of the Nintendo 3DS system?
The main reason is because we didn't have word about the Nintendo 3DS when we started working on Investigations 2! As soon as the first Investigations went on sale in Japan, it was only within a month or two that we started the ball rolling on the sequel. So at the time we got the ball rolling, we hadn't known anything about the Nintendo 3DS. It's just a matter of timing, really.

Do you ever feel the desire to return to programming instead of producing?
Actually, more than programming, I'd actually like to direct one more game. I feel like I still have one more in me. Onimusha 2—I got to direct that, and that was a really big hit. That was wildly successful, so I was happy with that. Then I moved on to Shadow of Rome. Unfortunately, the sales for that weren't what we had expected. The game itself I was really happy with—the way the game turned out—it just wasn't the sales success it could have been. So I've had experiences on both ends of the spectrum, if you will, so I'd like to take all those experiences that I had making both those games and just funnel them into one more game if I could.

What game that you've worked on has been the most enjoyable for you?
While I have strong feelings for each and every game that I've been involved with, I'd have to say the one that stands out the most is Shadow of Rome. It's the first completely original title that I got to develop as a director. It was tough, but I feel that we were able to make a new, original game in the end.

> *"I still vividly remember the feeling when I played Super Mario Bros. on the NES for the first time."*

How have things changed in the gaming industry since you started?
The game-development process has become very systematic, and that has its ups and downs. When I joined Capcom, the game-development process felt a lot more easygoing. Maybe that environment helped to produce crazy and off-the-wall game ideas. Now, we have solid schedules and organized teams, but in the process we may have lost the environment from which those unique ideas were created.

What aspect of creating a video game do you enjoy the most?
When a title is first being developed, I really enjoy coming up with various ideas with the team, and seeing those ideas take shape. Now, as a producer, I'm not as involved in the game creation process as I was when I was a director, so that's a bit regrettable.

When you are stumped by a particularly difficult problem while creating a game, what's your process for working through it?
I like to consult with my team members, bosses, and coworkers, and receive advice for solving problems. The final decision is ultimately mine, but it's very important to listen to other opinions from people around me.

What other games or game creators do you most admire or respect, and why?
I think Mr. Shigeru Miyamoto of Nintendo is amazing. I'm sure many other game creators would agree. I still vividly remember the feeling when I played Super Mario Bros. on the NES for the first time. Also, Space Invaders in the arcade. If not for these two games, I would not be here today.

Whose works in other forms of media, such as film or literature, do you most admire or enjoy?
I like a ton of movies, but my all-time favorite would have to be the *Star Wars* series. When I'm tired and just want to kick back, I like to watch *Le Grand Bleu* (even though it's not sci-fi).

What is your favorite hobby or pastime?
I like to DJ as a hobby. I play Euro trance and progressive techno music. Every other month we organize an event at an acquaintance's bar, and I enjoy being the DJ while hanging out and having drinks with my friends.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be?
Wow, that's a tough question! Well, I guess I'd have to go with teleportation ability. Lately, I've been going to the US and Britain quite often for business trips, and those long flights can be really tiring. It would be great if I could just arrive there in an instant.

GAMEOGRAPHY

Maya
"Spine tingling legal action! Mind numbing legalese! You will say 'wow'!"

PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY JUSTICE FOR ALL
2007, NINTENDO DS
ASSISTANT PRODUCER

Edgeworth
Franziska? I thought you were still in Germany...

ACE ATTORNEY INVESTIGATIONS: MILES EDGEWORTH
2010, NINTENDO DS
PRODUCER

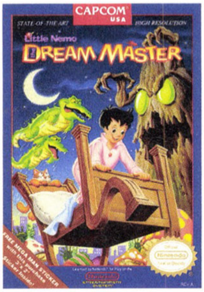
OKAMIDEN
2011, NINTENDO DS
PRODUCER

ACE ATTORNEY INVESTIGATIONS 2
2011 (JAPAN), NINTENDO DS
PRODUCER

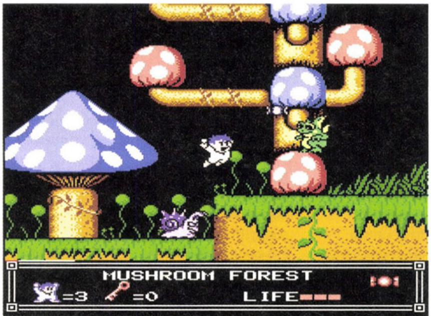
Why, yes, all the kids in 1905 had purple hair!

Little Nemo: The Dream Master

Sweet dreams are made of this.



PLATFORM: **NES**
PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM**
RELEASE DATE: **SEPTEMBER 1990**
COVERED IN ISSUES: **14, 16, 18, 26, 45**
PIECES OF CANDY REQUIRED TO RENDER ANIMALS UNCONSCIOUS: **3**

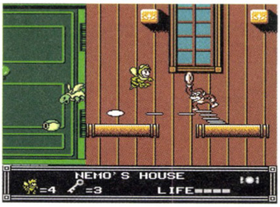


Cram candy down animals' gullets until they can't move, wear their skins like suits, then discard the carcasses when you're done. Fun!

When it comes to licensed video games, you expect to see adaptations of the latest Hollywood blockbusters or whatever cartoon the kids are into at the moment. Even popular toy lines are likely to end up translated to gaming devices. Something you don't expect to see turned into a game, however, is an 85-year-old comic strip. But that didn't stop Capcom from bringing us Little Nemo: The Dream Master.

OK, technically this game isn't *really* based on the comic strip. Instead, it's based on the animated film *Little Nemo: Adventures in Slumberland*, which was based on Winsor McCay's classic newspaper strip. The movie, though, didn't see a US release until two years after the game debuted, which confused a few people at the time.

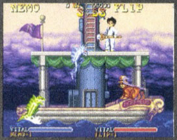
Confused or not, NES fans were amazed at how darn good the game was. Nemo's adventure begins when a messenger girl enters his room in the middle of the night with an invitation to Slumberland from the kingdom's princess. Like all good children, Nemo initially refuses to go until he is offered candy. Then—sure! He's more than eager to run off with a stranger in an enchanted dirigible.



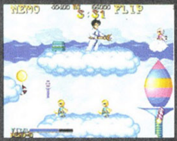
The limitless supply of candy serves Nemo well in the strange and dangerous world of Slumberland. Although the sweets don't harm any of the land's hostile creatures, a few animals will happily devour the treats. Feed those animals enough candy, and Nemo can combine with them to gain new powers and abilities. Teaming up with a frog, for instance, increases the height of Nemo's jumps and improves his swimming. Befriend a gorilla, and you'll be able to punch foes and climb obstacles.

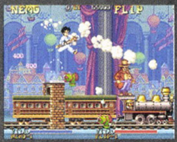
Mastering the use of each animal buddy is essential to fully exploring the large stages in order to find the missing keys that unlock the next area. Those wide-open, nonlinear stages, combined with the surprisingly aggressive enemies, make this a far more challenging game than the colorful graphics and bouncy music suggest. It may not have the name recognition of some of Capcom's other 8-bit offerings, but Little Nemo is not to be missed. **—PHIL T.**

THE FORGOTTEN DREAM



Little Nemo: The Dream Master enjoys a fair amount of notoriety as an NES classic, but were you aware that Capcom created another Little Nemo game that was also released in 1990? Simply titled Nemo, this arcade game is actually quite different from the home version. This was not an uncommon practice at the time; compare the arcade and NES versions of Bionic Commando, Strider, and Willow. Nemo is much more linear than its NES counterpart: the player simply progresses to the right while attacking enemies with a magic scepter. The arcade game does allow two-player simultaneous play, however, with the second player controlling Nemo's clown friend, Flip. Additionally, the arcade version adheres much more closely to the plot of the 1992 animated film while the NES version takes ample liberties with the story and settings.





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REVIEWS

IN-DEPTH REVIEWS OF ALL THE LATEST GAMES

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DS REVIEWS

ATV WILD RIDE pg.87

NARUTO SHIPPUDEN: SHINOBI RUMBLE pg.88

PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES pg.86

Mario and the gang try basketball, dodgeball, hockey, and volleyball—but are they any good at them?

Four Score

MARIO SPORTS MIX

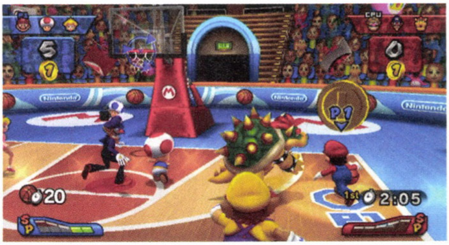
RATING: 8.0

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **SQUARE ENIX**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

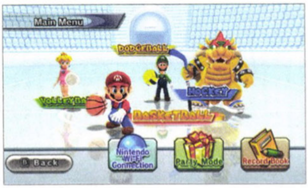
Before Mario Sports Mix, Mario's athletic outings had been sliding a bit. Despite an admirable performance on the soccer pitch, the plumber's recent sports history is known for so-so efforts on the baseball field, an uneven performance at the Summer and Winter Olympic Games, and an awful debut on the basketball court. When you also consider that there are plenty more lame multisport compilations than good ones, no one could be blamed for approaching the four-sport Mario Sports Mix cautiously. The good news is that no one needs to worry—Mario has returned to form with a strong set of sports that doesn't contain a single stinker.

GETTING IT RIGHT

Every sport in the package—basketball, volleyball, hockey, and dodgeball—offers a great mix of traditional rules and Mario madness. Reaching that balance is key; some past Mario sports titles have suffered from focusing too much on crazy stuff. For example, in the Nintendo DS dud Mario Hoops 3-on-3 (coincidentally, the only previous Mario Sports title by Square Enix), the player was pressured to run around the court collecting coins more than he was pushed to play basketball. At the opposite extreme, Mario's golf games—as great as they were—had such realistic environments and detailed real-life strategies that it seemed a little strange for a plumber and a princess to tee up. Mario Sports Mix, however, captures the essence of its sports while seamlessly weaving over-the-top arcade thrills with stage-specific gimmicks that put a subtle spin on the standard action. The distance between the basketball hoop and three-point line can change constantly, tall jets of water sometimes block part of the net in volleyball, leaping fireballs can toast players in dodgeball, and traffic cones and rollerblades may replace a goalie and skates in hockey. Some stage effects are more dramatic than others, but none of them interfere so much that they become an unwanted distraction.



As different as the four sports are, they share many controls—for example, shooting/throwing is always done with a shake of the Wii Remote controller, and pressing A and B together triggers a character-specific special move unique to each sport—which makes skipping back and forth between the games a snap. You can take part in interactive tutorials, but once you learn to play one sport the controls for the rest become fairly intuitive. As has become the norm, Mario Sports Mix includes the welcome option to play with or without the Nunchuk controller and motion controls, but what's unusual is that I prefer using them. I'm usually a sucker for remote-only NES-style



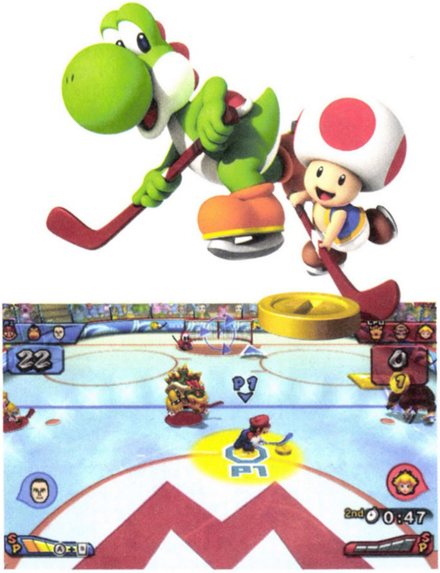
POWER
POWER
P1
25
1:45

Whether they are played on rafts, by the ocean, at Peach's castle, or in a standard gym, the games in Mario Sports Mix balance rules with zany fun.

controls, but moving around in a three-dimensional space feels more natural with the Control Stick, and shaking the remote to shoot, for instance, works fine.

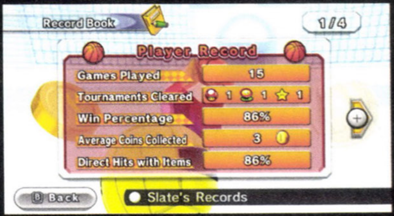
Anyone who regularly plays Mario games of any type will find the computer-controlled opponents in Mario Sports Mix to be pushovers on any difficulty setting lower than Hard; in my very first basketball tournament, my opponents for all three games scored a total of just two points. Thankfully, the tourneys get tougher as you go along, and the action in the unlockable hard-mode tournaments can be downright brutal. You can also up the challenge by playing on teams of three instead of two (both options are available for every sport) since the extra players leave less room to maneuver on the court or rink. But the real point of a game like this is to play against human opponents, and Mario Sports Mix deserves to be in the rotation at any late-night gaming session. The outrageous moves and table-turning power-ups will make for a lively party, and each sport has just enough depth to allow crafty players to develop their own unique strategies. You can even play via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection against friends (with friend codes) or random players (no friend codes required), which is a very welcome feature. We, unfortunately, were not able to play online in time for this review, but we can tell you that the mode will support up to four players split between two Wii consoles (one-on-one, one-on-two, or two-on-two).

In general, Mario Sports Mix is a very good title that offers a lot of bang for your buck. You can pick it up and feel safe that you will enjoy most, if not all, of the sports. But for those who would like to learn a little bit more before you buy, we're taking a closer look at each of the collection's four games.



STATS, STATS, AND MORE STATS

Number of games played, win percentage, tournaments cleared, direct hits with items—it's all in the record book, four pages filled with stats that will help you track (and obsess over) your progress.



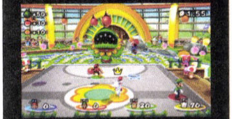
Record Book 1/4

Player Record

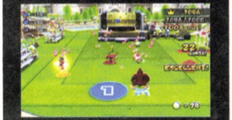
Games Played	15
Tournaments Cleared	1 1 1
Win Percentage	86%
Average Coins Collected	3
Direct Hits with Items	86%

PARTY TIME

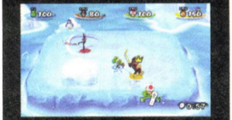
The Mario Sports Mix Party mode includes four frantic, party-style minigames, each of which can be played on several stages. They aren't as fun as the full-featured sports, but they offer a decent distraction when you need a break from the norm.



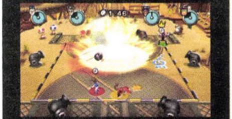
FEED PETEY
Race the other players to the fruit with the highest point value and shoot (or slam) it into Petey's big mouth.



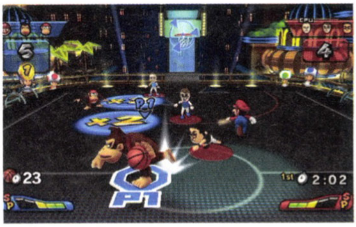
HARMONY HUSTLE
Get to the indicated spots in time to receive balls that fly at you to the beat of the music.

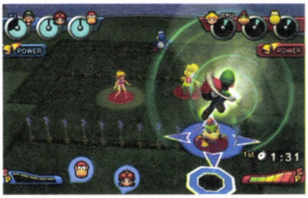


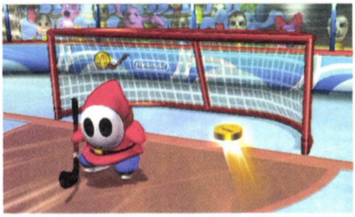
SMASH SKATE
Avoid hunks of ice and swing your hockey stick to knock opponents over the edge of the platform.

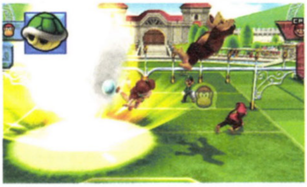


BOB-OMB DODGE
Simply run clear of the raining Bob-ombs while tripping up the other competitors so they get caught in the explosions.









[Above] Special moves and explosive power-up items can be used in several strategic ways.

HOOP IT UP

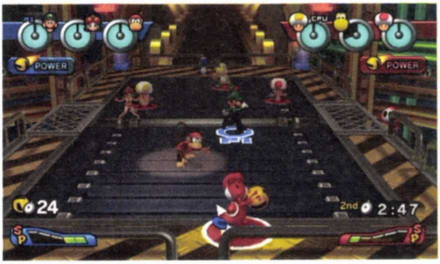
I'm a big hoops fan, so it's hard for me not to pick basketball as my favorite sport in the collection. Of course, being a fan also means I'm critical of the game's take on the sport, and after being let down by the Square Enix-developed Mario Hoops 3-on-3 a few years ago, I wasn't expecting much from the developer's Wii attempt. But with a heavier emphasis on putting the ball in the basket than on endlessly chasing after coins, Mario Sports Mix b-ball is a winner. I like that stealing the ball can be done simply by placing a defender in the passing lane, which allows for use of real-world knowledge of player movement and spacing. And the lack of fouls and goal-tending leads to some intense midair battles at the rim.

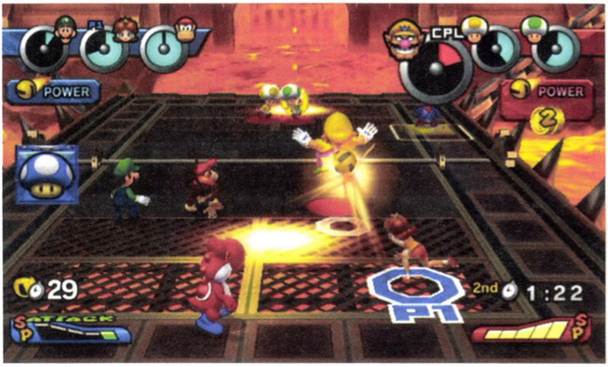
HAT TRICK

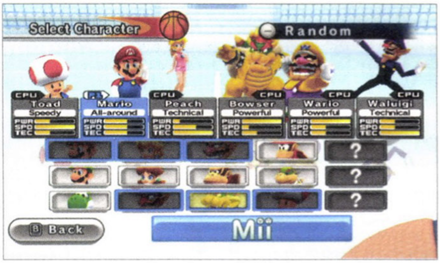
Playing Mario Sports Mix hockey with friends takes me back to the good old days of NHL Hockey on the Sega Genesis, which is high praise. The fast pace and easy scoring keep the action tense, and since characters can take a few good hits before being knocked down, chasing and avoiding opponents provide constant fun. Fights can even break out when play gets exceptionally physical, and even though these confrontations are shown as cartoony scuffles amid flailing arms and clouds of dust, the very concept of Mario taking a swing at his pals makes this game a winner.

SUPER SPIKE

For most sports fans volleyball doesn't have the prime-time appeal of basketball or hockey. However, the sport has a history of making for fun video games and that hasn't changed here. The pace of the game is a bit slow—a single first-to-15 match might have been better




POWER
CPL
POWER
29
2nd 1:22
P1
ATTACK
SP
SP


Select Character
Random
CPU Toad Speedy
P1 Mario All-around
CPU Peach Technical
CPU Bowser Powerful
CPU Wario Powerful
CPU Waluigi Technical
PWR
SPD
TEC
?
?
?
B Back
Mii

than its best-of-three-matches structure—but it may be the most nuanced sport in the lineup. Do you risk blocking a spike at the net or stay back? Do you use your near-unstoppable, ball-summoning special move to score immediately, or save it for when the ball is out of reach? Do you spike the ball down into an opponent's face, or trick him with a long lob? There's plenty to figure out in volleyball, which makes it a hard sport to master and a fun one to engage in with friends.

HIT 'EM HARD

Like volleyball, dodgeball can make for fun, addictive video games, even for people who don't know or care much about the real sport. This is the slowest and most methodical game in Mario Sports Mix, but with Mario and his pals trying to smack each other with a ball, it isn't like watching people play chess, either. It's easy to catch the ball when an opponent throws it—simply press A and B together when it hits you—which makes dodgeball a psych-out game as you try to predict which character will throw and when, and if a throw might be a feint. Although dodgeball is good, the faster action of the other sports provides a stronger temptation.

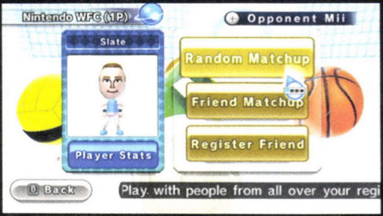
GOOD GAME

What could have made Mario Sports Mix better? You could argue that some of the sports aren't as inherently appealing as popular games like golf, soccer, baseball, or tennis (we'd love to see Mario and the gang play football one of these days). And while each sport offers much more than the events found in compilations like Mario vs. Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games, they still aren't quite as robust as Mario's single-sport titles. But on the other hand, Mario Sports Mix is loaded with extras such as bonus party games, an obsessive level of automatic record-keeping, a long list of tournaments to clear, and plenty of goodies to unlock, such as new locations and secret characters.

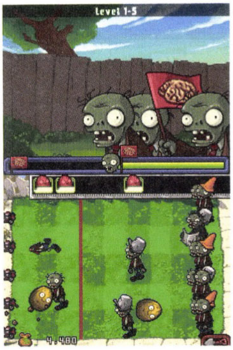
When all is said and done, it's highly likely that Mario Sports Mix will be the definitive Mario sports experience for Wii. The game is worthy of a spot alongside Mario's best sports titles. —**CHRIS S.**

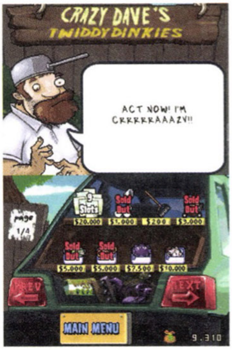
THE WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS

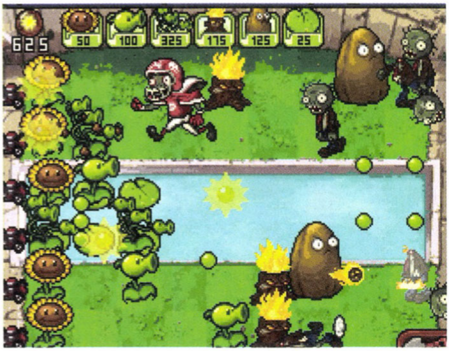
Think you've got game? Then take your talents online to challenge friends (via friend codes) or play random games against anyone else (no friend codes needed) using Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. Up to four people can play in one-on-one, one-on-two, or two-on-two competition across two Wii consoles.


Nintendo WFC (1P)
Opponent Mii
Slate
Random Matchup
Friend Matchup
Register Friend
Player Stats
B Back

Play with people from all over your regi







Gird Your Lawns

PLANTS VS. ZOMBIES

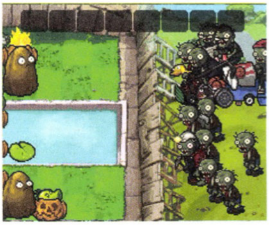
RATING: 9.0

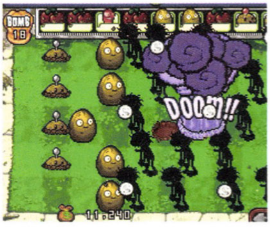
PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **POPCAP GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **POPCAP GAMES**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Sometimes you encounter gameplay so simple and engaging that you open your Nintendo DS handheld with the intention of passing a dull moment, only to realize that hours of fervent screen-tapping have swiftly slipped by. Plants vs. Zombies offers that kind of gameplay. Just when you think you've had enough of zombies invading every form of media, PvZ attracts you with its silly humor, hooks you in with a compelling adventure mode, and keeps you coming back with a whole backyard of lively and long-lasting minigames. Much like the undead's insatiable appetite for brains, my appetite for playing this surprisingly endearing game is bottomless.

In case you haven't heard of PvZ—and missed its wave of popularity that began on PCs last year—here's a rundown: Your mission is to defend against the dreaded yet endlessly amusing zombie army that is attempting to cross your lawn and eat your sweet, delicious gray matter. Your only defenses against the voracious hoard are your loyal and hearty plants, curiously designed to repel intruders via a vast variety of creative means.

Your yard is usually divided up into five lanes that zombies travel down to get to your house. To set plants in a lane you need to spend bits of sunshine that periodically fall from the sky or that are generated from the sunflowers you plant. Collect sunshine and place plants, and before you know it you'll be managing a little economy of solar power and leafy doom. If you don't set up you defenses properly, though, the horde can eat through your plants and overwhelm your yard, so you must stay ever vigilant about collecting sunshine and maintaining your defenses.





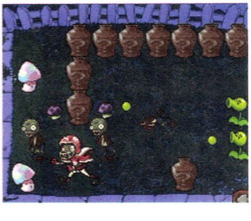
As you strategically assemble your army of charming and colorful botanical battlers, you can pummel the pasty pack of pansy-eaters with bulletlike peas, hurled watermelons, butter, spikes, explosives, mushroom gunk, and (my personal favorite) projectile peas covered in fire.

PvZ's main adventure will have you defending different parts of your house as you progress through the levels. Each area has its own varying environmental conditions—fog, a pool in the yard, or a lack of sunlight—that will create a fresh challenge and make you switch up your strategy. Once you're through with the adventure mode—though trust me when I say you'll never really be "through"—you can begin a chain reaction of unlocking a plethora of minigames. The minigames serve as another huge time sink of photosynthetic fun, as you endure survival challenges, frenetically tap through puzzle levels, and leisurely maintain a zen garden of your favorite goofy little plants.

Regardless of opinions on the saturation of zombies in every form of entertainment these days, Plants vs. Zombies is a silly, fun, and addictive little game with a ton to offer, all in the form of a gameplay style that should appeal to any gamer. PvZ will grab you in its mesmerizing clutches and leave you slack-jawed and ceaselessly shuffling about for more.

—DAVID M.

[Below] The minigames will keep you playing long after the campaign is over.



WRITERS' BLOCK

WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL FIVE ESSENTIAL NINTENDO DS GAMES?

JUSTIN CHENG

Sadly, my list is kinda boring: Tetris DS, Mario Kart DS, Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney, Professor Layton and the Curious Village, and Elite Beat Agents.

CHRIS HOFFMAN

Even though it just came out, I have to pick Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective. Rounding out the list are Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow, Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney, Elite Beat Agents, and Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2.

CODY MARTIN

Chrono Trigger, Kirby Super Star Ultra, Pokémon Heart Gold and Soul Silver Versions, The World Ends with You, and Mario Kart DS.

DAVID MURPHY

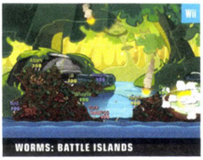
Shin Megami Tensei: Strange Journey, Ninjatown, Bangai-O Spirits, The World Ends with You, and Plants vs. Zombies.

CHRIS SLATE

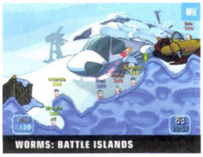
Don't make me choose! Well, OK: Tetris DS, Mario Kart DS, New Super Mario Bros., Elite Beat Agents, and The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks. Wow, that wasn't as hard as I thought it would be!

STEVE THOMASON

Both of our interns chose my all-time favorite DS game—The World Ends with You. Who knew they had such good taste? My other four choices are Elite Beat Agents, Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow, Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story, and Professor Layton and the Unwound Future.



WORMS: BATTLE ISLANDS



WORMS: BATTLE ISLANDS

WORMS: BATTLE ISLANDS

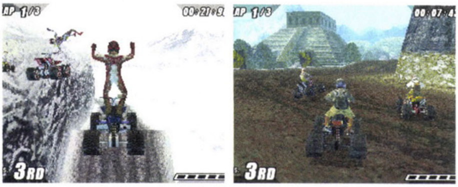
RATING: 7.0

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **TEAM17 SOFTWARE**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

If you've played a Worms game in the past 10 years, you might think about passing off Worms: Battle Islands as just another Worms title. But if you aren't burned out on the formula (or if you've never played a good round of Worms), you'll find that Worms: Battle Islands is a respectable addition to the Worms legacy.

As expected, the core gameplay is mostly unchanged: control a team of mouthy worms and strategically destroy your opponents by way of cartoony weaponry on a destructible landscape. Although the traditional experience will grow old for the seasoned, there are enjoyable new offerings. By ranking up, for example, you are awarded in-game perks before matches even begin. The extent of customization (levels, weapons, worms—everything) at your disposal is impressive, and the game's puzzle mode (involving obscure objectives with a limited arsenal) kept me coming back. There's a Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection option, too, although the competition was lacking most times I tried to find a game.

Still, both Worms veterans and newcomers alike should check out Battle Islands; with such little left to expand on, this is probably as good as it's going to get. **—CODY M.**



Very Few Bumps on This Wild Ride

ATV WILD RIDE

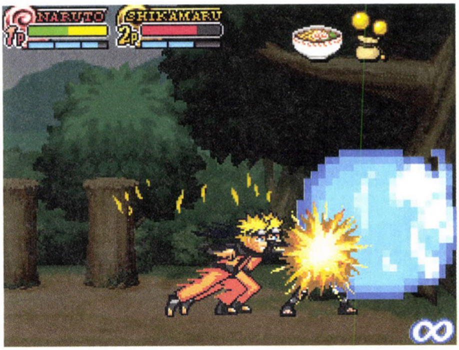
RATING: 7.0

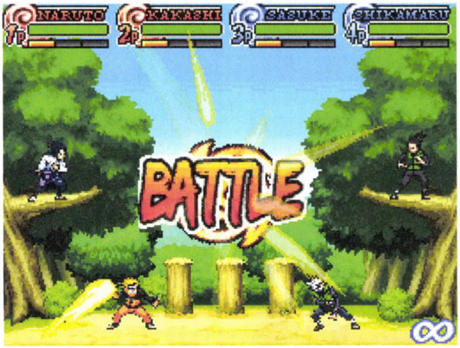
PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **DESTINEER**
DEVELOPER: **RENEGADE KID**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

In-the-know ears perked up when it was revealed that Renegade Kid, developer of Dementium and Moon, was at work on an arcade-style ATV racer. Fans of the genre have been wondering ever since if the well-esteemed studio would deliver the quality that's often missing from arcade racers.

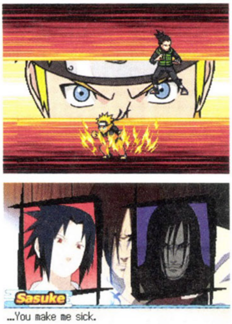
Fortunately, things have panned out. ATV Wild Ride starts with an undeniably solid feature set: eight riders and eight ATVs (most of which must be unlocked), single- and multiplayer modes, four race styles (World Tour, Quick Race, Freestyle, and Time Trial), 24 tracks styled after locations worldwide, and leaderboards that track your accolades. The racing engine handles well (if you often find racing games frustrating, you'll be surprised how controlled the handling is here) and is based on a clever interplay between nailing tricks and winning races; in short, you need nitros to win, and you get them only by landing stunts. This mechanic creates just enough dynamic tension to keep you engaged race after race. And the environments help; tracks themed by location—Canada, England, Mexico, Russia, Thailand, and the USA—keep the visual repetition to a respectable level.

Of course, there are niggles. Your rider has no effect on gameplay, and the handling of the ATVs doesn't vary greatly, so these choices feel largely cosmetic. And while the tracks are visually distinguished, a certain functional sameness can make racing feel repetitive over time. Also, note that multiplayer is a no-go unless everyone has their own game card. And finally, music. It's a matter of taste, I know, but the grossly overcompressed, manic rock that haunts play had me plunging over cliffs to escape the torment. Mercifully, the Options menu lets you turn it off. **—PATRICK C.**

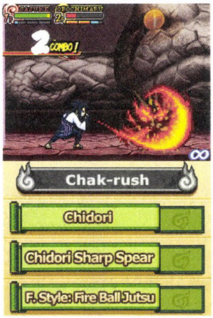




Not Exactly a Smash


Sasuke

...You make me sick.



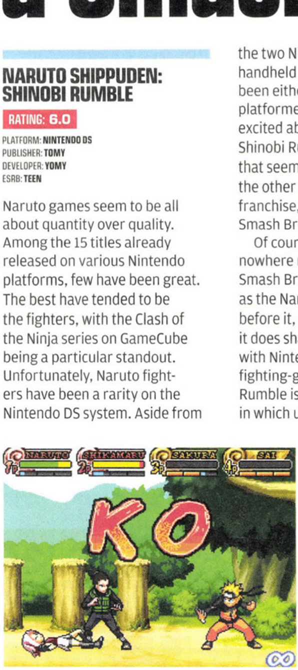
NARUTO SHIPPUDEN: SHINOBI RUMBLE

RATING: 6.0

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **TOMY**
DEVELOPER: **YOMY**
ESRB: **TEEN**

Naruto games seem to be all about quantity over quality. Among the 15 titles already released on various Nintendo platforms, few have been great. The best have tended to be the fighters, with the Clash of the Ninja series on GameCube being a particular standout. Unfortunately, Naruto fighters have been a rarity on the Nintendo DS system. Aside from the two Ninja Destiny titles, the handheld Naruto games have been either RPGs or action-platformers. That's why I was excited about Naruto Shippuden: Shinobi Rumble—a Naruto fighter that seemed to be different from the other entries in the Naruto franchise, focusing on Super Smash Bros.-esque battles.

Of course, Shinobi Rumble is nowhere near as good as Super Smash Bros.—nor is it as good as the Naruto fighters that came before it, for that matter—but it does share some similarities with Nintendo's exceptional fighting-game franchise. Shinobi Rumble is centered on skirmishes in which up to four combatants, controlled by either the AI or your friends (via local wireless; sadly, there's no online play), face off in platform- and item-filled battlegrounds. However, here your goal is to deplete your opponents' health, as you cannot ring them out. The items are mainly health-replenishers and stat-boosters, as well as hazards such as smoke bombs that confuse your character and reverse your left and right movement.



Another point of similarity to Super Smash Bros. is the easy-to-pick-up-and-play controls: Y for lighter attacks, X for stronger attacks, B to jump, A to block, and R to teleport left or right. Techniques—Naruto's Rasengan, for example—are performed by tapping the appropriate option on the touch screen; you have up to three techniques to choose from, and more can be unlocked by playing the Special Missions mode, wherein you fight under a certain set of conditions. (You must strike the enemy first, for instance, or you have to defeat foes without using techniques.)

The Special Missions mode is the second-best part of Shinobi Rumble (the best being the multiplayer) because it provides some gameplay diversity. The other modes get old pretty quickly—especially the Personal Battles mode, in which you select one of the game's 16 characters and fight a series of adversaries. The Story mode, thankfully, is broken up with a retelling of events from—spoiler alert!—when Sasuke forms his gang to when Pain starts his invasion. However, the story is told in a way that can be difficult to follow for Naruto newbies but is also uninteresting to longtime fans, as it's primarily heads talking via text.

This is not to say that Naruto Shippuden: Shinobi Rumble is a *bad* game. The combat is perhaps too simple, but it *is* fun, and I appreciate that this is a different kind of Naruto title for the DS. It's just a shame that the game doesn't live up to its potential. **—JUSTIN C.**

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

HELLO
my name is
Chris

This is Chris, hardcore gamer. He's been playing games ever since he could grip a controller. When he was growing up, **his parents used the ESRB ratings** to choose the games that were right for him. One day he'll use the ratings to **decide what games his kids play** – he just doesn't know it yet.

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REVIEWS ARCHIVE

THE COMPLETE LIST OF NINTENDO POWER REVIEWS FROM THE PAST YEAR

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS

Wii

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
2010 FIFA World Cup South Africa	6.5	Electronic Arts	254	E
All Star Karate	7.0	THQ	255	E10+
Arc Rise Fantasia	7.5	Ignition	256	T
Attack of the Movies 3D	4.0	Majesco	255	T
Avatar: The Game	5.0	Ubisoft	250	T
Batman: The Brave and the Bold: The Video Game	7.0	Warner Bros. Interactive	260	E10+
Calling	5.0	Hudson	253	T
Create	5.0	Electronic Arts	262	E
Data East Arcade Classics	6.5	Majesco	252	T
Deca Sports 3	4.5	Hudson	261	E
Despicable Me: The Game	4.0	D3Publisher	258	E10+
DJ Hero 2	9.0	Activision	262	T
Donkey Kong Country Returns	8.5	Nintendo	262	E
Endless Ocean: Blue World	7.5	Nintendo	252	E10+
Epic Mickey	8.5	Disney	263	E
FIFA Soccer 11	8.0	Electronic Arts	260	E
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The Crystal Bearers	8.0	Square Enix	250	T
FlingSmash	7.5	Nintendo	261	E
Flip's Twisted World	6.0	Majesco	260	E
Fragile Dreams: Farewell Ruins of the Moon	5.5	XSEED	253	T
GoldenEye 007	8.5	Activision	262	T
Green Day: Rock Band	8.0	MTV	256	T
Guilty Party	7.0	Disney	259	E
Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock	8.0	MTV	261	T
Gunblade NY & LA Machineguns Arcade Hits Pack	5.5	Sega	259	T
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows—Part 1	4.0	Electronic Arts	262	T
Iron Man 2	4.0	Sega	256	T
Ivy the Kiwi?	7.5	XSEED	259	E
Jambo! Safari	3.5	Sega	250	E
Kirby's Epic Yarn	8.5	Nintendo	261	E
The Last Airbender	6.0	THQ	257	T
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4	7.5	Warner Bros. Interactive	257	E10+
Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole	4.5	Warner Bros. Interactive	260	E10+
The Lord of the Rings: Aragorn's Quest	5.5	Warner Bros. Interactive	260	T
Lost In Shadow	8.0	Hudson	263	E10+
Madden NFL 11	8.5	Electronic Arts	258	E
Major League Baseball 2K10	7.0	2K Sports	253	E
Metroid: Other M	8.5	Nintendo	259	T
Michael Jackson: The Experience	6.5	Ubisoft	262	E10+
Monster Hunter Tri	9.0	Capcom	254	T
MySims Skyheroes	7.5	Electronic Arts	260	E10+
Namco Museum Megamix	5.0	Namco Bandai	261	E
Naruto Shippuden: Dragon Blade Chronicles	4.5	Tomy	262	E10+
NBA 2K11	6.5	2K Sports	261	E
NBA Jam	9.0	Electronic Arts	260	E
NHL Slapshot	6.0	Electronic Arts	259	E
No More Heroes 2: Desperate Struggle	9.0	Ubisoft	252	M
Pac-Man Party	4.5	Namco Bandai	262	E10+
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Gottlieb Collection	6.5	Crave	251	E
Pirates Plundarrr	4.0	Majesco	255	E10+
PokéPark Wii: Pikachu's Adventure	7.5	Nintendo	261	E
Prince of Persia: The Forgotten Sands	8.0	Ubisoft	255	T
Pro Evolution Soccer 2010	8.0	Konami	250	E
Racquet Sports	6.5	Ubisoft	253	E
Raving Rabbids Travel In Time	6.5	Ubisoft	262	E10+
Red Steel 2	8.0	Ubisoft	254	T
Rock Band 3	9.0	MTV	261	T
Sakura Wars: So Long, My Love	7.5	NIS America	253	T
Sam & Max: Beyond Time and Space	8.0	Atari	255	T
Samurai Warriors 3	6.0	Nintendo	260	T
Sengoku Basara: Samurai Heroes	7.0	Capcom	261	T
Shiren the Wanderer	6.5	Atlus	252	T
Sid Meier's Pirates!	8.5	2K Games	260	E10+
Sin and Punishment: Star Successor	9.0	Nintendo	257	T
The Sky Crawlers: Innocent Aces	7.0	XSEED	250	T
Sonic Colors	9.0	Sega	261	E
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing	8.0	Sega	252	E
Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	8.0	Activision	260	T
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II	8.0	LucasArts	261	T
Super Mario All-Stars	9.0	Nintendo	263	E
Super Mario Galaxy 2	9.5	Nintendo	256	E
Super Monkey Ball Step & Roll	5.5	Sega	252	E
Swords	5.0	Majesco	260	T
Tatsunoko vs. Capcom: Ultimate All-Stars	9.0	Capcom	251	T
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 11	9.0	Electronic Arts	256	E
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	6.0	Ubisoft	262	T
Tournament of Legends	7.0	Sega	257	T
Toy Story 3: The Video Game	7.5	Disney	257	E10+
Transformers: Cybertron Adventures	5.0	Activision	258	T
Trauma Team	8.0	Atlus	255	T
TRON: Evolution—Battle Grids	6.5	Disney	263	E10+
Wii Party	7.5	Nintendo	260	E
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011	7.5	THQ	262	T

MORE ON:

EPIC MICKEY

That the reviews for Epic Mickey have been all over the place doesn't really surprise me. I expected it to be a pretty polarizing game. It definitely has some camera and pacing issues, but if you're the type that puts a premium on creativity (or you're a hardcore Disney aficionado), those faults are easy to forgive. —**STEVE T.**

Nintendo DS

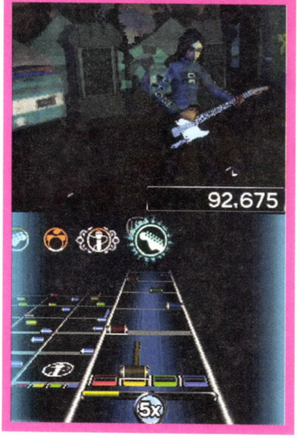
TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Ace Attorney Investigations: Miles Edgeworth	8.0	Capcom	252	T
Again	7.0	Tecmo Koei	253	T
Assassin's Creed II: Discovery	7.0	Ubisoft	250	T
Atari's Greatest Hits Vol. 1	5.0	Atari	261	E
Avatar: The Game	5.0	Ubisoft	250	E10+
Beat City	8.5	THQ	254	E
Bejeweled Twist	8.5	PopCap	251	E
Blue Dragon: Awakened Shadow	7.5	D3Publisher	256	E10+
Crafting Mama	7.0	Majesco	261	E
Crime Scene	5.0	SouthPeak	253	M
Dawn of Heroes	7.5	Majesco	253	E10+
Deca Sports DS	5.5	Hudson	253	E
Dementium II	8.0	SouthPeak	255	M
Despicable Me: The Game—Minion Mayhem	7.0	D3Publisher	258	E
Dragon Ball: Origins 2	8.0	Namco Bandai	256	T
Dragon Quest IX: Sentinels of the Starry Skies	9.0	Nintendo	257	E10+
Etrian Odyssey III: The Drowned City	8.5	Altus	260	E10+
Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes of Light	8.0	Square Enix	260	E10+
Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective	9.0	Capcom	263	T
Glory of Heracles	7.0	Nintendo	251	E10+
Golden Sun: Dark Dawn	8.0	Nintendo	262	E10+
Harvest Moon: Grand Bazaar	6.0	Natsume	258	E
Infinite Space	8.0	Sega	253	T
Iron Man 2	6.5	Sega	256	E10+

Ivy the Kiwi?	7.0	XSEED	259	E
Kingdom Hearts Re:coded	8.0	Square Enix	263	E10+
The Last Airbender	7.5	THQ	257	E10+
The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks	9.5	Nintendo	250	E10+
Lufia : Curse of the Sinistrals	8.0	Natsume	260	E10+
Mario vs. Donkey Kong: Mini-Land Mayhem!	7.5	Nintendo	262	E
Mega Man Zero Collection	9.0	Capcom	256	E
Naruto Shippuden: Naruto vs. Sasuke	5.0	Tomy	262	E10+
Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors	9.0	Aksys	262	M
Picross 3D	7.5	Nintendo	255	E
Pokémon HeartGold Version	9.5	Nintendo	253	E
Pokémon Ranger: Guardian Signs	7.0	Nintendo	260	E
Pokémon SoulSilver Version	9.5	Nintendo	253	E
Professor Layton and the Unwound Future	9.0	Nintendo	260	E10+
Puzzle Quest 2	7.5	D3Publisher	257	E10+
Ragnarok DS	5.0	XSEED	252	E10+
River City Soccer Hooligans	7.0	Aksys	256	T
River City Super Sports Challenge	6.0	Aksys	258	T
Rooms: The Main Building	7.0	Hudson	253	E
Rune Factory 3: A Fantasy Harvest Moon	8.5	Natsume	262	E
Sands of Destruction	7.0	Sega	250	T
Shin Megami Tensei: Strange Journey	8.0	Atlus	253	M
Sonic Colors	7.5	Sega	261	E
Sonic & Sega All-Stars Racing	6.0	Sega	252	E
Sonic Classic Collection	7.0	Sega	253	E
Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	7.0	Activision	260	E10+
Squishy Tank	8.0	Natsume	253	E
Super Scribblenauts	8.5	Warner Bros. Interactive	261	E
Tetris Party Deluxe	8.5	Majesco	256	E
Transformers: War for Cybertron	7.0	Activision	258	E10+
TRON: Evolution	6.5	Disney	263	E10+
WarioWare D.I.Y.	8.5	Nintendo	253	E

MORE ON:

ROCK BAND 3

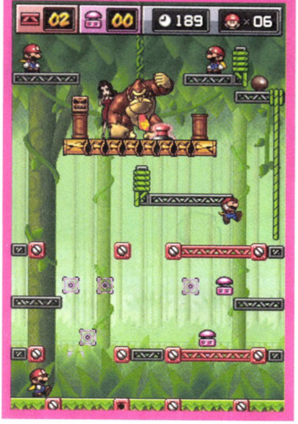
Rock Band fans would be remiss in skipping the Nintendo DS version of Rock Band 3. Not only does it do a pretty good job of approximating the traditional Rock Band experience, but the game also puts a entertaining spin on the familiar Rock Band gameplay. Instead of playing just one instrument, you play as the whole band, switching between note highways at will. Higher levels of difficulty will put your multitasking skills to the test, but that's actually part of the appeal of Rock Band 3 on DS. —**JUSTIN C.**



MORE ON:

MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG: MINI-LAND MAYHEM!

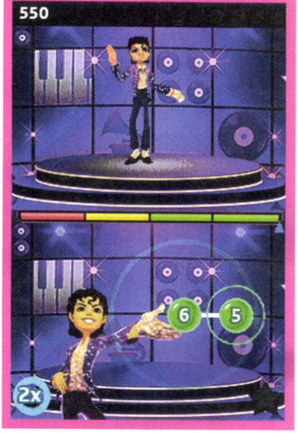
This pocket puzzler is built on simple mechanics but quickly gets tricky. Although I long for the days when Mario vs. Donkey Kong titles incorporated more platforming action, this latest installment is my favorite of the Mini-Land era. Dragging the stylus across the screen to create ramps and barriers feels good, and clearing the way for the unstoppable Minis creates an enjoyable tension as the toy automatons constantly court danger. —**CHRIS S.**

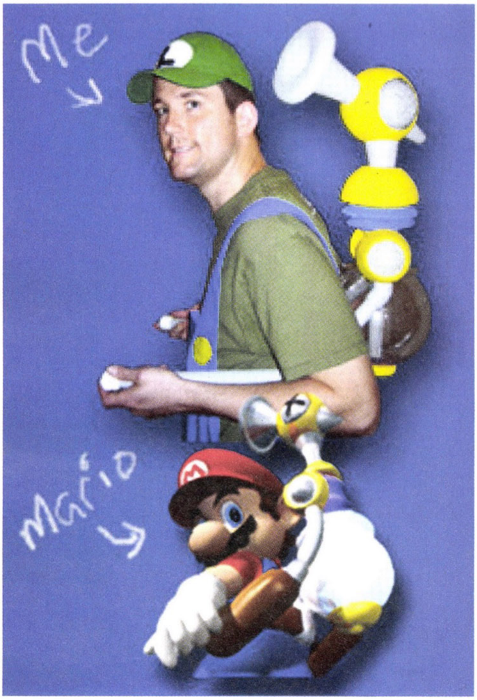


MORE ON:

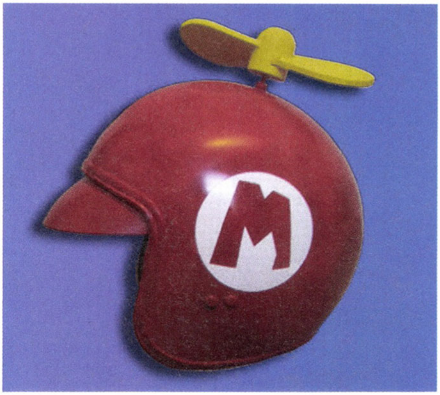
MICHAEL JACKSON: THE EXPERIENCE

If you like the gameplay of Elite Beat Agents or the music of Michael Jackson, you should definitely look into the DS version of Michael Jackson: The Experience—and if you're a fan of both (like I am), you should go buy the game immediately. It completely copies EBA's action, from the tapping of concentric circles to the spinning of discs to the dancing interludes, but the lack of originality matters little. The music quality is excellent, and the action may match the rhythm even better than EBA's does. Too bad it doesn't have that title's quirky charm. —**CHRIS H.**





You may not be able to use these Mario accessories, but that doesn't make them any less cool!



FANDOM

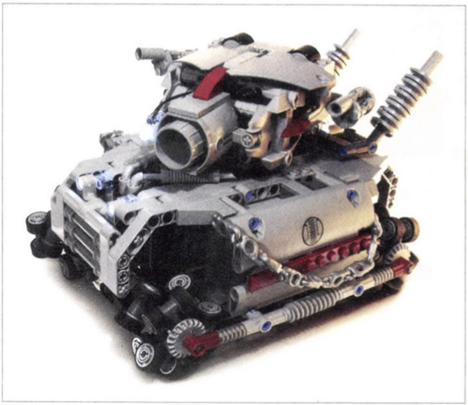
Masterful Mario Accessories

These DIY power-ups rock!

WHEN IT COMES TO CHARITY, Brian Brinegar doesn't play around. Well, he does, actually. In addition to being one of the three individuals behind the highly successful annual Mario Marathon (see the write-up on that event on page 95), Brinegar is the mastermind behind the ultrasweet homemade Mario accessories shown above. Using ordinary household items, some tools, and a few crafting supplies, he created a realistic life-size version of the FLUDD from Super Mario Sunshine and the propeller helmet from New Super Mario Bros. Wii.

Both items appeared as props in recent Mario Marathon events, though inspiration for them originally stemmed from a previous project. "Prior to the original Mario Marathon in 2008, my wife and I had made a set of Mario and Luigi costumes for Halloween," Brinegar tells us. "These costumes quickly became a staple of the Mario Marathon experience, receiving substantial screen time during the first two events."

The costumes were such a hit that he decided to craft new Mario accessories for Mario Marathon 3, and set out to make the FLUDD and the helmet. Even better, Brinegar posted detailed instructions for how to make them yourself at www.mariomarathon.com/fludd and www.mariomarathon.com/helmet. **—NATHAN M.**



FANDOM

Holding a Metal Grudge

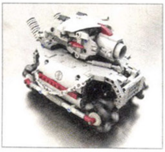
This Metal Slug–inspired LEGO Tank packs rolling thunder.

MANY SKILLED LEGO crafters also have a love for games, often combining the two to make some incredible designs that pay tribute to their favorite characters and titles. We've seen some truly outstanding LEGO renditions of video game icons, but few have bowled us over quite like this pint-sized, fully functioning LEGO tank replica from the Metal Slug series, crafted by LEGO enthusiast and graphic designer Peer Kreuger.

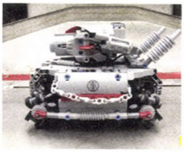
Hailing from the Netherlands, Kreuger, 26, is equally smitten with both LEGO blocks and pixels. Making computer graphics and building plastic-block creations have a lot in common, he says, and the pixelated look of old-school games offers a ton of inspiration. "What attracts me to old-school video games [is] they often only have a tiny amount of pixels to work with, but they're used to craft characters, atmosphere, and entire worlds," he notes. "Metal Slug is especially great with this; every screen is jammed full with details, animation, and gorgeous use of color."

The game's mechanical designs are particularly compelling to Kreuger, since they balance realism with caricature, and the tank caught his eye right away. Over the course of two days, he set out to build the motorized LEGO tank by matching pieces as closely as possible to the vehicle's design. It took around 500 parts to construct the main tank, though Kreuger also crafted two additional motorized LEGO camera vehicles to film the tank in action. Taking them out to a nearby skate park, he shot a wild video that shows off the tank's incredible maneuverability.

"The responses I get from people are pretty amazing," he says. "It's great with kids...I hand them the remote, and they'll be racing all over the place." Check out the video of Kreuger's Metal Grudge in action at his website, www.mahjqa.com. **—NATHAN M.**



If only the tanks in the Metal Slug games moved as fast as this remote-controlled one.



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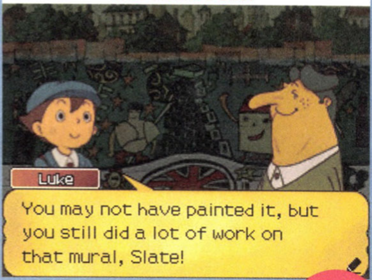


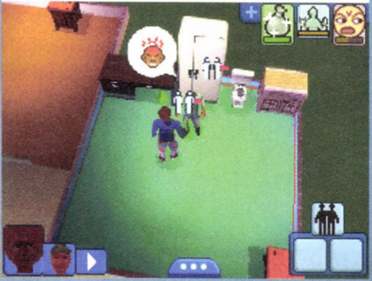
Luke

You may not have painted it, but you still did a lot of work on that mural, Slate!

It was only after Chris Slate was arrested for vandalism that he discovered his pal Luke was actually an undercover cop.

Here's our caption. THINK YOU CAN DO BETTER?

VOLUME 262'S SHOT



"I'd be mad too if I saw my roommate on the toilet while I tried get the Sunny D out of the fridge." **—FELIX C.**

"After trying hard to stop his brother from snacking, the man was forced to stop him only one way—by rage." **—KAOCHI**

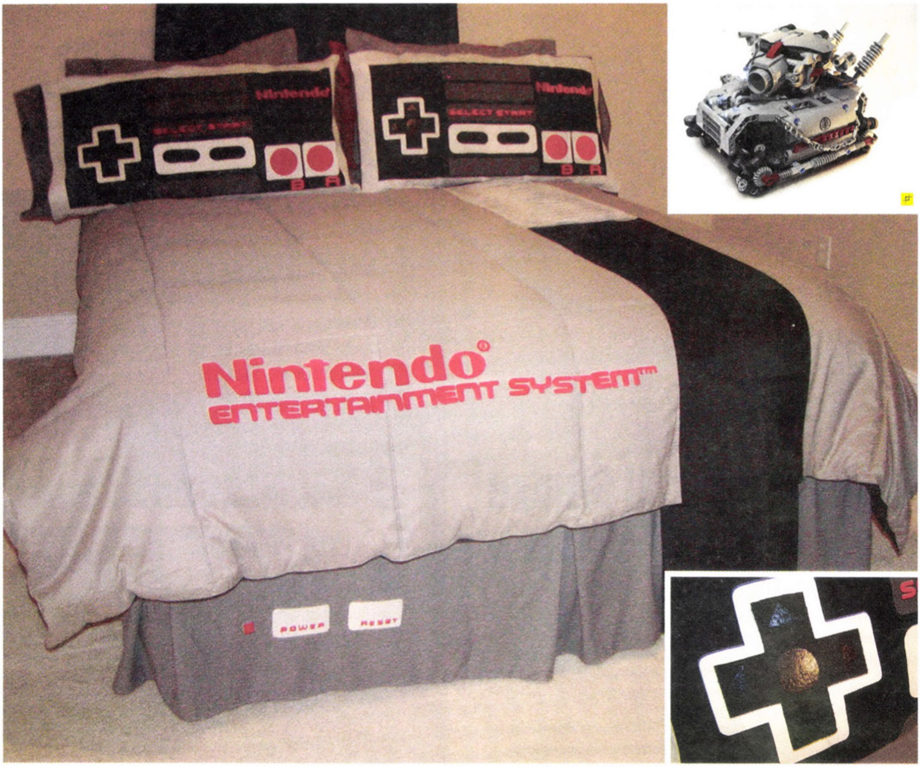
"You ain't mad that there's no pizza! You're just jealous of my awesome hair!" **—DIDDY KONG'S PAL**

"Jim was horrified to find that not only his walls were disappearing." **—ZAPPERBOY**

"It is easy to confuse a fridge and a toilet, especially when they are right next to each other." **—WHALE33**

ABOVE *and* BEYOND

Got art, cosplay, case mods, etc.? Send them to us via email to **community@nintendopower.com** or via snail mail to Nintendo Power/Community c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Court, STE 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. We'll print the best stuff!



We were going to say something about the idea of calling a bed an "entertainment system," but this bedding set is too awesome for such a lowbrow joke.

FANDOM

Best. Bed. Ever.

Now you're resting with power!

WHY PUT YOUR LOVE of Nintendo on pause while you sleep? Lucky reader Kevin Riley of Cumming, Georgia, doesn't have to, thanks to the hard work and ingenuity of his sister, Cathryn, and mother, Brenda. With Kevin's 21st birthday on the horizon, the pair hatched a plan to craft a custom bedding set based on the Nintendo Entertainment System. As you can see from the photos, they nailed the look of the classic console, complete with controller-based pillow covers.

Cathryn says the idea came to them while eating at one of their favorite Mexican restaurants, which her mother claims was more than a coincidence. "Mom still swears they put something extra in the salsa that day," exclaims the 22-year-old Cathryn. The two toiled on the project for more than a month before Kevin's birthday, working hard to mimic every tiny detail while keeping it all a secret from the intended recipient.

Despite "plenty of mistakes, do-overs, and many, many trips to the craft store," Cathryn says it was time and effort very well spent. She recalls, "The look on his face that day made it all worth it. My brother is one of the most amazing people I know, and it felt great to be involved in creating something truly unique and special for him." —**ANDREW H.**

GAMING FOR GOOD!

Mario Marathon Madness

Epic gaming for an epic cause

WHEN A NEW MARIO GAME comes out, it's not unusual to see enthusiastic players pulling all-nighters to dive into the latest round of Goomba-stomping action, but a group of dedicated gamers from Lafayette, Indiana, have taken things to the extreme to raise money for charity. Each year Brian Brinegar, John Groth, and Chris Deckard enjoy a brief break from their IT jobs at Purdue University to clock in one of the most epic gaming sessions imaginable: the Mario Marathon.

Now in its fourth year, the interactive Internet-broadcast event has the trio playing Mario-series games ranging from the original Super Mario Bros. on NES up to the latest titles for the Wii console. As certain donation goals are reached, new levels are unlocked and the team will tackle them. They play in shifts, so each player gets four to six hours of sleep per day. Prize giveaways, celebrity guests (Wil Wheaton and Felicia Day called in last year), and impromptu silliness from sleep deprivation keep the event lively, notes Brinegar. Last year the participants collectively played 108 straight hours of hours of Mario games. That's more than four solid days of Mario action.

"I grew up playing Mario with friends, and millions of people around the world have shared this same experience," Brinegar says. "The Mario Marathon provides an opportunity to relive that childhood experience and share it with thousands of new friends online, and at the same time raise money to create similar experiences for kids who, due to illness, are unable to be at home with their friends."

Inspiration for the Mario Marathon came from a group of students Brinegar found online who were broadcasting a marathon Zelda gaming session. He says the players were only asking for pizza donations but managed to raise much more money than expected and decided to donate it to Child's Play. "It seemed like such a great way to raise awareness of the cause, and a good excuse to play games for days on end, and thus the idea for the Mario Marathon was born," Brinegar recalls.

The first Mario Marathon, held in 2008, greatly surpassed the original fundraising goal of $1,500—it drew in over $11,000 in donations. The event grows each year, and has raised nearly $45,000 in three years. The trio is hoping to make 2011's Mario Marathon the biggest yet. Visit www.mariomarathon.com for more info. **—NATHAN M.**

Sitting in a Mario-themed room while wearing Mario and Luigi costumes? If you're going to participate in a Mario marathon, this is the way to do it.

NEXT MONTH

Vol. 265 will be a can't-miss issue for anyone interested in the upcoming Nintendo 3DS handheld (which, as far as we can tell, is everyone with a heartbeat), with big new looks at top titles like Super Street Fighter IV 3D Edition, Dead or Alive Dimensions, Ridge Racer 3D, and loads more!

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